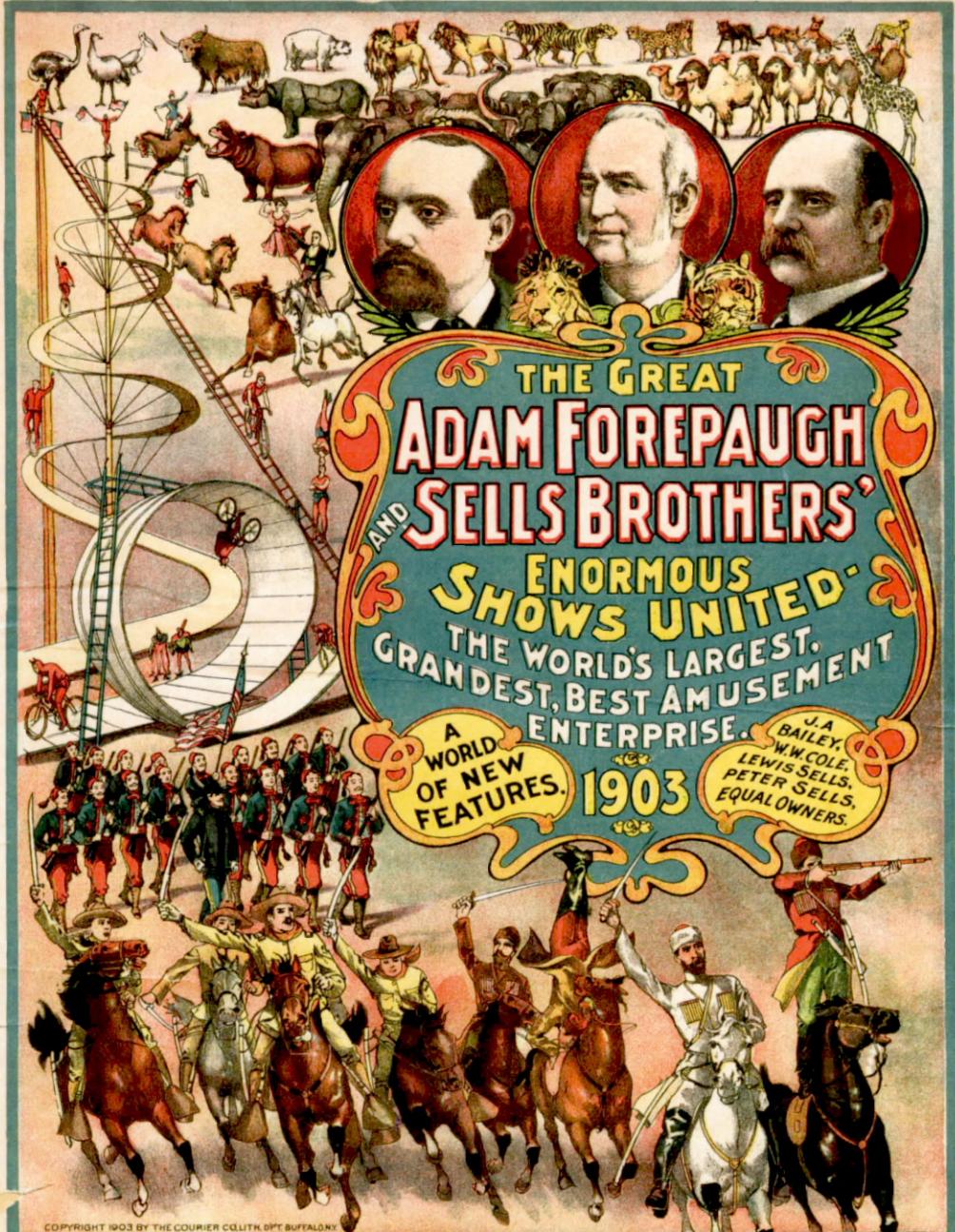


# BANDWAGON

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2010



KOKOMO, WEDNESDAY, JULY 29

# BANDWAGON

**The Journal Of The Circus Historical Society**

Vol. 54 No. 6

**FRED D. PFENING III**

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2010

**EDITOR AND PUBLISHER**

*Bandwagon*, The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968. is published bi-monthly by the Circus Historical Society, Inc., 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691. Periodical Postage paid at Columbus, OH. Postmaster. Send address changes to *Bandwagon*, 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691.

Editorial, advertising and circulation office is located at 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212, Phone (614) 294-5361. Advertising rates are: Full page \$100, half page \$60, quarter page \$35.

*Bandwagon* new membership and subscription rate is \$40.00 per year in the United States, \$48.00 per year in Canada and outside the United States. Single copies \$4.00 plus \$3.50 postage. Please direct all concerns regarding address changes and lack of delivery to the editor. Membership applications can be found on the CHS web site: [www.circushistory.org](http://www.circushistory.org).

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## OUR COVER

While James A. Bailey's Barnum and Bailey Circus toured England and the continent from 1897 to 1902, the Buffalo Bill Wild West and the Forepaugh-Sells Circus, Bailey had an interest in both, appeared in towns traditionally on the route of the Greatest Show on Earth. Forepaugh-Sells, for example, opened in New York's Madison Square Garden from 1899 to 1902. During that period the show also played week-long under-canvas engagements in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago.

Forepaugh-Sells was for the most part off the big-city circuit in 1903 as Barnum and Bailey was back in the states. The opener in St. Louis was the season's only week-long engagement. In fact, except for a two-day date in Kansas City in mid-May, the rest of the route was made up of one-day appearances.

In spite of playing fewer large towns that year, the show came home

a winner. James A. Bailey, William W. Cole, Lewis Sells and Peters Sells each owned a quarter of the enterprise. They divided \$139,350.20 among themselves, each pocketing \$34,837.55 by season's end. That was serious money, approximately \$876,000 in 2009 dollars. Nevertheless, the money looked paltry compared to the 1902 profit when the show cleared an astonishing \$339,048.40.

The performance was strong on thrill acts. Minting the Marvel went up and down a huge spiral, said to be 60 feet high and only 20 inches wide, on a unicycle. Starr, The Shooting Star, rode a bicycle down an almost upright ladder. The program said the ladder was 100 feet long; the courier had it at only 79 feet. The Gaynell Septette rode bicycles inside an angled fenced track said to be only 20 feet in diameter. It was a primitive version of the Globe of Death. Diavolo rode his bike through the loop-the-loop as the closing act, which was

modestly billed as "The Crowning Sensation of the Century."

More traditional fare was, of course, also offered in the three rings and stage. The elephant presentation was probably the best in the country with the Original Eight Forepaugh Dancing Elephants commanding center ring. A number of well-known horse trainers and riders were with the show, headed up by Bud Gorman, Emma Stickney, Nellie Ryland, and the Lowande family featuring the great Oscar Lowande, the first person to do a horse to horse somersault. Other acts included the St. Leon acrobatic family from Australia, and the Aurora Zouaves, a precision military drill team, one of whose members was Carl Hathaway, later the General Manager of the Ringing-Barnum Circus.

Every self-respecting circus had hippodrome races and Forepaugh-Sells was no exception. A tribute to Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders was the first of the six hippodrome displays. Next, three horse tandem teams jumped over hurdles. Then came the clown race followed by an exhibition of Roman standing riding. The ladies' flat race and a four horse Roman chariot race between a man and a woman concluded the competition.

Opening in late April, Forepaugh-Sells appeared in the Plains states and the Midwest through the spring and summer. The show headed south in late September with the intention of spending the last six and a half weeks of the tour in the old Confederacy.

On 20 October the circus had a good day in San Antonio, Texas, bringing in a respectable \$5353.95, most of it from the afternoon performance. That same day four cases of yellow fever were diagnosed in San Antonio.

The next day Forepaugh-Sells was scheduled to play Flatonia, Texas, a nothing town whose only virtue was being about half way between San Antonio and Houston on the Southern Pacific Railroad. The engagement was cancelled, presumably because of the yellow fever outbreak. Only the candy and balloon stands opened, adding all of \$82.55 to the treasury.

Later that day, health authorities stopped the Forepaugh-Sells train three miles out of Houston where they informed the show that it could not play there on the twenty-second because it had appeared two days previously

in areas affected by the fever. Town fathers were fearful the circus would bring the contagion to their city.

Beaumont, Texas, and Crowley, Louisiana, scheduled for the 23rd and 26th of October respectively, had already declared quarantines, and circus management doubtless saw nothing but trouble ahead. The remaining fourteen towns on the route were cancelled, and the show immediately scampered back to winter quarters in Columbus, Ohio.

The 1903 courier on the cover measures 10 1/2" x 15" and contains sixteen pages that publicized virtually every aspect of circus day. The images on the front and back covers specify what the show's press department thought were the most popular parts of the performance. The hippodrome Rough Riders were most prominently featured, although the Aurora Zouaves, Diavolo, Minting the Marvel, and Starr, the Shooting Star were all highlighted. The acrobats, riders, clowns and exotic animals almost seem an afterthought. Diavolo had the back cover all to himself, suggesting he was the show's biggest feature. Printed by the Courier Lithograph Company of Buffalo, New York, this particular copy of the booklet has a distinguished provenance. It was originally part of the John P. Grace collection. Grace was a pioneer circus

historian and route documenter who probably obtained this courier when Forepaugh-Sells played his hometown of Kokomo, Indiana on 29 July 1903. After his death in 1950, Richard E. Conover purchased Grace's extensive collection, one of the best ever assembled. It was later acquired by Fred D. Pfening, Jr. from Conover's estate and is part of Pfening Archives. Fred D. Pfening III

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## Author's Request

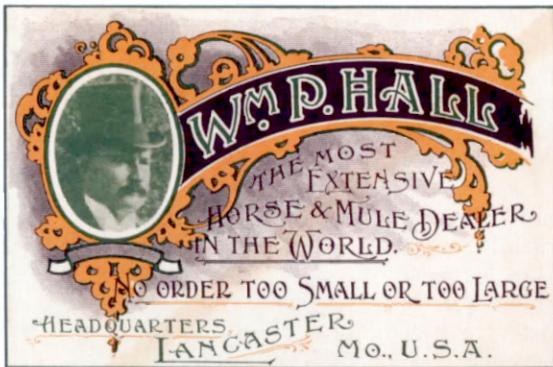
**Professor Peta Tait, La Trobe University, would like to include three photographs from Clyde Beatty's book *Facing the Big Cats* in her forthcoming book *Wild and Dangerous Performances*.**

**PearsonEMA/Heinemann claim "no trace of the contractual details" so Peta would like anyone involved with producing these photographs and similarly photographs of Damoo Dhotre from *Wild Animal Man* to contact her directly at: [P.Tait@Latrobe.edu.au](mailto:P.Tait@Latrobe.edu.au)**

*Season's Greetings*



*from* **Struppi Hanneford & Everyone at**  
**ROYAL HANNEFORD CIRCUS**



Hall's impressive business card modestly proclaimed him "The Most Extensive Horse & Mule Dealer in the World." Pfening Archives.

*There are many things that could be said about William Preston Hall. He came from a huge family. He learned how to make ends meet at a very young age. He was a first class horse trader. He was a loving and caring husband. He was a proud father. He was generous in his assistance to any and all. He was a businessman. He had many monikers such as Billy Hall, Diamond Billy, Col. Wm. P. Hall, or just William Hall. He proclaimed himself the "Horse King of the World," a title that would last!*

#### THE EARLY YEARS

William Preston Hall was born in Schuyler (pronounced Skyler) County, Missouri on February 29, 1864. Although his travels took him to the East Coast, to Europe, and South Africa as well as across the American Midwest, he called Missouri home his entire life.

William Hall's paternal grandparents were James P. Hall and Frankie Rice. Both lived long lives with James passing away at the age of 93 and Frankie at 88. Both were exceptionally long-lived for the nineteenth century. William Preston's parents were both originally from the Edinburg area of Kentucky. His father, William F. Hall (1832-June 22, 1879), and his mother, the former Sidney Spurgin (February 8, 1839-June 2, 1877) both moved to Schuyler County where they filed for a marriage license on April 5, 1856.

William Preston's oldest brother, George W., was born in 1861. He became a blacksmith. His older sister Isabelle was born in 1862. William Preston was the third child, born in 1864, followed by Louis J. born in 1866, a sister, Anoma C., born in 1870, a brother, Dewit, born in 1876 and the youngest sister, Donah, born in 1877.<sup>1</sup>

The Halls were a poor rural farming family, having little to their name and working hard for everything they had. Census records

# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM PRESTON HALL

By Bob Cline

## PART I

years later indicated that William F. Hall was not able to read or write. (Billy told the story later that the only day he wasted was the one day he went to school.) In a 1921 interview, Hall said that he started learning about and trading horses at the age of 10. His sister Isabelle died on June 1, 1876 at the tender age of fourteen. His mother died a year later on June 2, 1877, being only 38 years old, and leaving his father to raise the entire family by himself. Sadly for the Hall children, their father died on June 22, 1879, at the age of 47, which left the children orphans. Dewit, who was born on May 23, 1876, died shortly after his father on August 19, 1879. All the Halls were laid to rest in the Fabius Cemetery in Downing, Missouri.<sup>2</sup>

Brother Louis moved into the Adolph and Sarah Schupbek farm at the age of fourteen, working as a farm hand. George Hall was married and worked as a blacksmith in Downing, Missouri. Anoma married a gentleman by the name of Buford and remained in the Lancaster, Missouri area where she raised her family. William P. Hall, fifteen, now faced life on his own. He had nothing to his name. He hired his services out to a neighbor as a farm hand. The 1880 census finds him in the home of George Beeler along with George's wife and 20 year old son, Jack. Here he earned a dollar a week plus board. He saved enough money to buy a horse, hoping to make a better living for himself. A little over a year later, he left this family and bartered a deal with the Stretch Livery Stable

Hall poses on the road in front of his farm about 1913. Railroad coach on right came from Yankee Robinson Circus. Hall used the front half of the car as an office and the back as sleeping quarters for elephant men. The farm's water tower is on left. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.



in Lancaster to work there in exchange for room and board plus a stable and feed for his horse.

At the Stretch Livery Stables he was able to learn about something very dear to his heart—horses. Billy had a keen eye for horses and learned everything he could about them while working here. He became quite proficient at spotting good horses and ones not good. His keen sense of horseflesh also made use of his great memory that allowed him to recall seeing a horse previously, even if the farmer tried to color the horse a different color.

### IN THE BEGINNING

While the methods and equipment used in farming had vastly improved between 1820 and 1870, the farmer needed more horse power to work this new equipment and the larger acreage. There were some draft horses in America but they were light weight compared to what we recognize now as draft horses. The first European draft horses were imported in 1839. After the Civil War many varieties of horses including Percherons, Belgians, Clydesdales and Shires were cross-bred and further importation helped to bulk up these fine animals to become more powerful. This draft stock was commonly referred to as "chunks" later on in sales barns.<sup>3</sup>

After working around the horse business for almost two years, Billy met George Meng of Philadelphia, a noted horse trader. Meng was quite impressed with Hall's horse sense and convinced the young man to purchase a load of horses for him. Billy wasted no time in finding an agreeable bunch of horses to send to Philadelphia. He also accompanied the shipment to assure a smooth transaction and complete satisfaction on Meng's part. Billy was learning the horse trading business in a big way and it was his hard work and determination that had him selling horses to the Chicago stockyards by the time he was 20.<sup>4</sup> One of his biggest clients was the American Express Company to which Hall provided all their horses west of the Mississippi.<sup>5</sup>

Hall was driven to succeed in all he did. He thought "Outside the Box" as we would say today. He knew there were horses to be bought and sold right there at home, but he also realized that there was a far larger market for his horses outside of Missouri. With the initial order from Meng and the trip to Pennsylvania, Billy saw a world opening up before his eyes that he never knew existed. While his loyalty was to the Lancaster area, he soon found a market for his horses on the east coast. It didn't take long to discover that buying horses for a fair price at home still gave plenty of leeway for a profit in other parts of the world. Having made up his mind that he would never be as poor as he was growing up, he turned his eyes in a new direction that provided a far better quality of life than he had ever known.

Local farmers sold horses to Hall as soon as they became useful as work animals. Hall also provided employment for locals. As his business grew, he needed more and more people to load and ship horses. Many times, some of these men accompanied the horses and mules to their final destinations to feed, water and care for them en route. The world of the Lancaster men who worked for Hall became much larger as well.

Billy's business association with Meng continued. A letter in the Hall Papers at the Circus World Museum Research Library indicates that the Andreas Meng's Sons' Tioga Horse Bazaar in Philadelphia had a carload of "pacers and trotters, saddlers and drivers, also coachers purchased by Hall & Meng." Newspaper clippings from Lancaster consistently mentioned car loads of horses being sent to Philadelphia for many years to come.

Hall worked up and down the East Coast selling horses and meeting potential buyers every chance he could. By 1889, just

seven years after he really started to sell horses for a living, he was able to buy the central tract of what became the Hall Farm two blocks north of the town square in Lancaster.<sup>6</sup> The 1890 census states his business started about that year and lists his profession as a horse buyer

With Hall's reputation as an outstanding horse buyer and seller slowly growing, he became a racing man using pacer horses at local fairs and events. He started to develop the financial freedom that he always wanted and willingly matched a race with his horse Little Beckley against another man's horse for a \$400 purse. He developed another pacer he called Daisy M. He contracted to sell her for \$1000, but that deal didn't materialize. That was pretty big money in the late 1800's for a race horse.

Missouri was one of the premier locations in the United States for raising horses. Lancaster, in 1891 had the Becroft and Baker Barns and the Stretch Livery Barns, two blacksmiths and an unknown number of farmers raising horses. Breeders specialized in the fine quality lineage of their Belgians and Percheron stallions and Jacks. According to an agriculture census taken in 1890, Missouri was home to 246,191 horses with 113,124 of them being foals. This put Missouri fourth behind Texas, Illinois and Iowa for having horses.

When it came to mules and asses, Missouri ruled the world, housing 245,101 mules and 6,441 asses. Missouri was home to 1/6th of all the Jacks in the country. What was very interesting in this census was the rate of growth over the previous ten years. While the horse population increased by almost 45% in the ten years since 1880, the mule population only increased by 27% which indicated a slowdown in the mule trade after 1880. Farmers, being frugal in every way, found by and large that two mares could work on a farm and sire two colts, while two mules would only work on the farm. Thus, the change from mules to horses was widely accepted as a good farming practice.

Little is positively known of his horse business prior to 1891 when the newspapers that have survived were recorded on microfilm. As we begin our journey following his footsteps in 1891, we find Billy Hall operating as a one man horse buying machine. He scoured the hillsides from town to town and state to state throughout the week looking for good horses and attending every sale that

## HORSES WANTED!



W. P. HALL

Hall had a flair for the show business before he became involved with circuses, using an engraving of himself to attract attention. He got it placed on the front page of the *Lancaster Excelsior* of May 21, 1892. Author's collection.

he could. After making his purchases and paying his customers, he then made arrangements with the railroads for the right number of stock cars to be available at the right location, get the livestock loaded and fed, shipped to Lancaster, then unloaded and quar-

tered. Having now purchased the livestock, he sold them, arranged with the railroads for stock cars in Lancaster and loaded and shipped the horses and mules to consumers. Every Saturday he stayed in Lancaster buying horses exclusively at the Stretch Livery Stables. On Sundays he took a well deserved rest.

To put the horse buying in perspective, by the spring of 1892, he was placing about 30 horses in a railroad car, selling horses by the car load to mostly eastern markets and being bragged on in the local newspapers

Hall at twenty-eight in the photo used to create the engraving on his display ad. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum collection.

as spending \$7,000 to \$10,000 per week buying horses and mules. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1892, Hall placed an ad containing a likeness of himself to buy horses in the *Lancaster Excelsior* for the first time. He is standing, very well dressed with a vest, tie and overcoat, holding his top hat in his hand. Quite an eloquent figure he was. He was making his mark in the horse kingdom. He wore his Prince Albert coat of a light blue color, silk top hat and sparkling diamonds for years to come. His name became synonymous with class. He wasn't one to argue about the quality or the price of a horse or mule. From the very early stages of his career to the very end, Hall always offered a fair price to any and all. The sellers were always welcome to take it or leave it.

On April 30 the *Lancaster Excelsior* detailed a Ben Hall going to buy horses in Kansas City for William P. Hall. This is the first mention of others' involvement in his horse business. Ben Hall was a first cousin of Billy Hall, their fathers being brothers. That's not to say there weren't hired hands at the farm as I'm sure there were. Ben was the first person who worked for Billy buying horses to help cover much more territory.

Still enjoying horse racing, Hall bought another stallion called Broker from Alex Morris for \$300 in June of 1892. He then entered Black Diamond, a fine young mile running horse; Daisy M., his pacer; and his new horse Broker, the half mile running



champion, in the races in Kirksville over the July 4th weekend. It is with great interest to us that the name of Bert McClain shows up in the Lancaster papers in 1892 also. Young Bert and his brother Walter were running a chair factory in Browning, Missouri.

As President Grover Cleveland was about to take office for his second term, the Philadelphia and Reading railroad went bankrupt on February 23, 1893 after greatly over-extending itself. Economic historians have considered this to be the beginning of the Panic of 1893. The chaos resulted in people withdrawing money from banks, which caused a ripple effect of instability in the financial structure of the United States. Over 15,000 businesses went bankrupt, 500 plus banks failed, and many railroads collapsed. Estimates were that 17%-19% of America was unemployed. The *Lancaster Excelsior* carried a half page of notices for Sheriff's sales for most of 1894. With the exception of three issues 1893 Lancaster newspapers do not exist. Many properties were simply abandoned and a multitude of people drifted out west to start all over again. Farmers not only struggled with a poor economy that drove down the price of their crops but droughts were an increasing burden to farmers as well. It all sounds too familiar doesn't it?

The 1893 newspapers that do exist show a real nice 2" x 3" ad that Billy ran looking for horses, mares and mules at the Stretch Livery barns every Saturday. This ad ran rather regularly through 1895 except for the time Hall spent in Richmond, Virginia. We find him buying horses in Southern Iowa in one edition and that his trotters and pacers were under the care of Ira Myres as the racing continued despite the economic woes of the country. Billy was a hard-working man in making his horse business become what it was. In 1894 he was consistently in four to five towns a week, buying horses and then returning to the Stretch Livery Stables for the horse sales each Saturday. Hall was very adept in sizing up a quality horse and wasn't afraid to give a man a fair price for his horses and mules. While only 30, Hall was spending the astronomical sum of \$7,000 to \$10,000 a week on horses.

It is interesting to note that while the Panic of 1893 was sweeping the country, Billy Hall was pushing forward and expanding his horizons. Because his business depended upon the availability of livestock and feed from the local farmers, the Lancaster area didn't suffer the extremes that other areas of the country did as Hall was a huge help to the local economy. Hall also prospered during the Panic of 1907 and during the chaos of World War I. In fact, the years from 1914 to 1919 were the heyday of the Hall conglomerate.

The Fiss, Doerr & Carroll Horse Co. in New York City dated back to the 1870s, and by the 1890s was a major player in the draft horse business. Pfening Archives.



## THE HORSE BUSINESS

To take a little bit different look at the horse business, the 1895 yearbook issued by the United States Department of Agriculture enumerated the numbers American horses exported to Great Britain in 1893, 1894, and 1895. While over 10,000 went to England in 1893, almost 23,000 were sent in 1895, accounting for almost \$3,000,000 of horses. How many horses were exported through Hall's sales is not clear. The horse and mule business was very lucrative for Hall, providing a substantial income. This money was invested in land, residences, improvements, automobile travels, and eventually into circuses. While Hall was very successful at the horse and mule business, he wasn't the only horse trader around. There were major companies throughout America that engaged in the horse business for many years. How Hall's operation fit into



Founded in 1883, Abe Klee & Son in Chicago was another major horse dealer. Pfening Archives.

the scheme of things is a bit cloudy. Newspaper accounts of cars of horses being shipped to eastern markets leave us wondering who and where the buyers were, and how were these horses used. Was he actually making the sale or was he supplying horse companies in the eastern markets for them to resell? There are numerous mentions of horses being shipped to Philadelphia and New York in particular over the years which were the homes of Andreas Meng's Tioga Horse Bazaar in Philadelphia and the Fiss, Doerr, and Carroll Horse Company in New York.

Manhattan, New York was the pinnacle of activity for high society and immigrants alike. East 24th Street was Mecca for the horse trade in and around New York City when the firm of Fiss and Doerr began in the 1870's. They started out with one building at 147 East 24th Street. By 1895, they were advertising themselves as "the largest dealer in horses in the world." They were offering a rain or shine sale every Monday and Thursday. They also operated branch sale barns in Albany and Buffalo, Jersey City, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The principals of Fiss and Doerr joined forces with the Carroll & Connelly Co., and then re-organized on January 1, 1896 to become the Fiss, Doerr, and Carroll Horse Company. They had an architectural firm design a seven story horse facility with ramps connecting these floors to other buildings. They owned most of a block with four separate buildings in use as stables, sales barns, and show rooms where wagons, sleighs, and harness were also available for sale. The elegant design of this seven story building provided a sales ring almost 200 feet long by 65 feet wide. The buyers sat above in a gallery that held as many as 1000 people at one time. Horse sales continued into the 1920's with the eventual sale of the entire complex in 1928 to the R & T Garage Company.

Much information about Fiss, Doerr and Carroll has become available in recent years with the advent of the internet and digi-

tal copies of old newspapers. The company didn't start conducting horse auctions until 1883. When it did begin these auctions, they limited themselves to offering only 25% of their stock each week. Here they offered what they called second hand horses—about 150 to 200 at each auction. They also offered around 350 western horses each week at auction. All this adds up to around 2000 head of horses being moved each week in New York City. They also advertised heavily throughout the town, spending as much as \$30,000 a year on posters and handbills.

The Barrett and Zimmerman Co., a cattle and horse brokerage company on Prior Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota, dealt with a lot of horses being brought in from Montana and North Dakota. Train loads arrived and the horses were unloaded into 10 corrals awaiting sale each week. They carried a full line of horses. They advertised between 500 and 1000 head of horses for sale at all times. Pacers and trotters as well as runners were available, as well as wagons, harness and accessories, and of course draft stock. The original Barrett and Zimmerman Horse Brokerage building still stands today.

It is owned by African immigrants and is called the Eritrean Community Center. The Barrett and Zimmerman Co. also kept a branch facility in operation in Duluth, Minnesota. Hall made several trips to Duluth over the years.

Abe Klee and Sons was based in Chicago. The 1875-1876 *Lake-side Directory* listed the firm at 24 Cornelia at the right rear of 45 Cornell. A newspaper article tells us that they had moved by 1905 when a horse kicked a gas meter in the boarding stable on Milwaukee Avenue, causing a gas leak that resulted in 11 horses being found dead the next morning. The March 25, 1905 *Billboard* carried a nice article about the firm that listed its new location as 273 North Centre Avenue in Chicago. It advertised that it had just sold a carload of gray geldings to the Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Circus.

The Sloan, Nims & Bratton horse dealership at the National Stock Yards in East St. Louis, Illinois was another large purveyor of horses of all kinds. They even went so far as to print a catalogue of horses offered at sales. One such catalogue was for a "Great Speed Sale of Track and Road Horses, Trotters and Pacers" in 1898.

Kittie C. Wilkins was as widely known in the horse business as Hall. She owned the Wilkins Horse Company in Pocatello, Idaho where all her horses were branded with a diamond as her nickname was the "Queen of Diamonds" and later she was called "The Idaho Horse Queen." Her ranch housed around 10,000 horses at all times. Her farm hands brought in wild horses from the area, broke them at her ranch and then sold them on the market. She is widely known from the West Coast to Kansas City. So great were her horse skills that in 1900 the Erwin, Grant & Co. in Kansas City bought 8000 horses at one time for the British for the Boer War. She shipped a train of 20 cars holding 520 horses every two weeks until all the horses had been shipped. That was the single largest sale of horses ever made in the West. Kittie died in 1936 at the age of 79.

The Tioga Horse Bazaar, owned by the Andreas Meng's Sons, Andreas, George, Charles and Adolph, was located in Philadelphia. Established in 1862, the dealers in horses and mules conducted

Headquartered in Cape Town, Louis Hall worked closely with his brother William to supply horses and mules what was then called United South Africa. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

sales every Wednesday at their stables-sales barn located at the corner of Twenty-Second and Clearfield Streets. The Mengs provided Hall with his first really big opportunity when they told him they would buy a car load of horses from him if he could get them together. This business relationship lasted at least 20 years, and probably much longer.

Billy, being born and raised in Missouri, decided to locate his business there. The love of his life, his fiancée Sarah Elizabeth Mitchell, was the daughter of a doctor serving the entire Lancaster area. Her father, Dr. William F. Mitchell (1842-1909), and her mother, the former Elizabeth T. Marshall (1846-1906), were both originally from Illinois. Her Grandfather Mitchell was a doctor as was one of her uncles. Sarah came from a large family, having nine brothers and sisters. Frank was the oldest brother, followed by Elmer, Mary, and Lillian. Sarah was in the middle, having been born in 1873. Her younger brothers and sister were William, Bertha, Robert, Herbert, and Oliver. Four of her brothers became doctors, one became a veterinarian, and one sister married an attorney. Sarah was used to the good times a family of financial means could have.

Billy had already been buying land around Lancaster. In addition to his farm and residence, he had a home near town in which Ferman Grant lived. Billy had a fence put up around the home in June so as to improve his investment. Billy's cousin Ben Hall had been in Richmond, Virginia selling horses for almost two months for Billy when he returned to Lancaster on February 26, 1894. How Richmond, Virginia was chosen as the location to sell horses isn't understood. Billy apparently kept this area in the back of his mind as he opened a sales barn in Richmond later in the year. He was having success in the horse trade. His April 20, 1894 ad proudly proclaimed that he had shipped over \$10,000 worth of horses to the East the previous week.

Lancaster, Missouri was a typical county seat. The centrally-located courthouse was the focal point of town. It was surrounded by streets on all four sides on which local businesses were located. Billy's winter quarters and farm was two blocks directly north of the courthouse. The house that eventually became Hall's home was two blocks due west of the courthouse. The Keokuk & Western Railroad cut through town from a southeast to northwest direction behind the Hall home. The Keokuk & Western eventually became the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. The railroad depot was about two or three blocks northwest of the Hall home. Directly across from the depot was a siding and the corrals of the Lancaster stockyards. Two spur tracks for Hall's show cars were just a little more northwest. While the barns were directly north of the courthouse, they all lined up from east to west along North Street point-

ing north and south. As the town was laid out in the relatively square pattern of city blocks, Hall's home was only about five blocks from the farm, walking distance at any time.

The weather was getting ripe for the summer racing season as Billy Hall asked for a match race between a horse owned by a gentleman from LaPlata named John A. Logan and Billy's horse Little Beckley. The purse was set at \$400. Curt Houssan then matched a race against Billy's horse, Daisy M., and his horse Dexter Power for a \$200 purse. The races were held in Kirksville on June 28. It is interesting to note

that Billy and Sarah were in the local news columns when they went to the circus together while dating. Perhaps this was merely a coincidence but it now looks like a prelude of things to come. They filed for a marriage license in the Schuyler County Courthouse on July 28, 1894.<sup>8</sup>

The wedding bells rang out for William Preston Hall and Sarah Elizabeth Mitchell later that day. Their marriage was performed by Reverend T. J. Enyeart of the M. E. Church in the Grand Central Hotel in Lancaster. The newspaper described Hall as being from northern Missouri. A well deserved trip to Minnesota and North Dakota took place for the happy couple about six weeks later.<sup>9</sup> Hall was not an educated man. He could neither read nor write, but he knew a sound horse when he saw one. His loving wife Sarah, also known as Sadie, taught Billy the basics of reading and writing as their years together would prove. Billy also lived with a speech impediment that caused him to stutter.<sup>10</sup>



Louis Hall, cr. 1910. Schuyler County Historical Society collection.

Hunting was a way of life on the Missouri hillsides. After some fun shooting birds at Johnny Mills's barn one Wednesday afternoon in October, an accidental discharge of Bert McClain's gun took off two fingers on his right hand. He also got several pieces of bird shot in his face and neck. The local physician, Dr. W. Mitchell, Sarah Hall's father, examined him. With the assistance of Doctors B. B. Potter and E. L. Mitchell, Bert was cleaned up, sewed up and bandaged. Bert was fine after taking some time to heal.

While their marriage was relatively young, the horse and mule business grew rapidly. Hall traveled to the East Coast on a regular basis. He saw the huge potential for horses and looked to Richmond as a good place to set up shop. His cousin Ben Hall had already spent about two months in Richmond selling horses earlier in the year. Billy made an initial trip to prepare a business adventure and possibly settle in Richmond on Saturday October, 20, 1894. He was gone for two weeks before returning to Lancaster. In late November of 1894, Billy and his young bride moved to Richmond, Virginia to start a fulltime sales barn and he asked his younger brother Louis to run it for him. Louis worked for and with Billy the rest of his life. Billy managed to ship out five cars of horses from

Lancaster and one more car from Memphis, Missouri before leaving for Virginia.

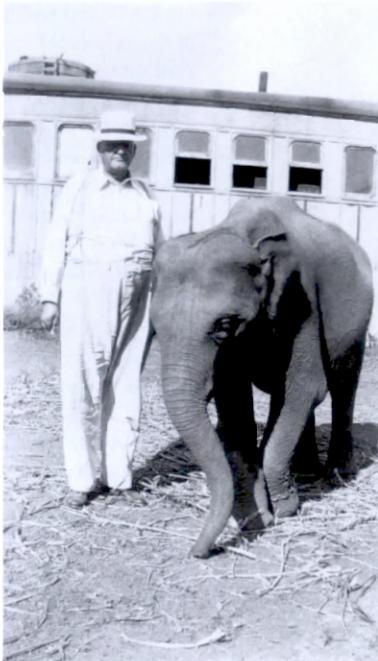
The surviving Hall records include some cancelled checks from 1894 which show his likeness on them. They were issued through the First National Bank in Richmond, Virginia and most business was done without a number on the check. It is important to note that this likeness is a mustached and well groomed gentleman in a bow tie, vest and jacket with a stunning diamond sparkling in the shirt. He was dapper and debonair. Hall had never been overseas or done business overseas at this point to have purchased his diamonds. A rent check for \$900 was made out to Edmond Bopieux on December 10, 1894.

Hall's signature appears on cancelled check, but many had the payee, amount and date lines written in another person's handwriting, perhaps Mrs. Hall's. It is interesting to see how the English language has changed over the years. One check for \$1023.70 was written as Ten Hundred Twenty-Three dollars and 70 cents. By December 15, 1894 a payment was made to the First National Bank for \$1600. Two of those checks are made out to W. A. Leyhe, who was buying horses for Hall back in Lancaster. By January of 1895 another checking account was being used through the Metropolitan Bank of Richmond, but these checks did not carry the likeness of William P. Hall on them.

The Richmond horse sales business opened with an ad in the *Richmond Dispatch* on December 14, 1894 announcing the Banner Sale-Stables located at 1806 to 1812 East Franklin Street would have an auction on Saturday consisting of 150 horses with an extra fine load of horses from Desmond, Iowa and an extra fresh load of horses consigned from Paten and Leyhe in Lancaster. W.P. Hall was the proprietor.

The sales flourished for about four months with horses being shipped from Lancaster to Richmond and also to various markets from Lancaster to fill all orders. By March 1895, it appears that the Richmond operation had closed as we have no further documentation of activity there.

Billy took to the road again and Sarah returned to Lancaster. The European market started learning about William P. Hall's operation and orders started to come in. Hall and a German man in Richmond prepared to leave with about 100 head of horses for Hamburg, Germany. Billy left on March 23, 1895 for about two weeks. The sale of those first 100 horses took very little time. Billy returned to Lancaster only long enough to acquire another 100 horses before heading back to Germany. Billy and his brother Louis left on July 15, 1895 from New York for the European markets aboard the *Augusta Victoria*.



Bert McClain was Hall's right hand man from 1896 until Hall's death in 1932. This image was taken shortly after Hall's death. The elephant's name is Mona. Pfening Archives.

Billy had made arrangements for more horses to follow him to Germany. Cousin Ben Hall left shortly thereafter with about 100 more horses. Business was booming in the German market and Billy didn't return home until Tuesday August 6, 1895. Brother Louis remained in Germany to run the operation. Once Billy was back upon Missouri's soil, he returned to the horse sales barns where he bought a carload of horses in Plano and Centerville, Iowa the Monday after he returned from Germany. By early September, Hall had three more cars of horses heading toward Germany, one car toward St. Louis and one car heading for Chicago. All the horses had been bought along the Keokuk & Western rail lines to speed up transportation. Billy was so excited about the prospects of selling horses abroad that he considered the Jacksonville, Florida area as another area of operation. This was looked into but never developed. However, another snippet in the local newspapers on September 27, 1895 indicated Billy was thinking about opening a barn in London. This area of sales would indeed happen a year or so later.

After his trips to Germany, Billy was back in the horse market locally again and started advertising his appearance at the Stretch Livery Stables on Saturdays. He bought horses in Missouri and Iowa all week long, making arrangements to ship the stock to Lancaster, selling the horses, and shipping them to the buyers. That was quite a work load. The local newspapers give us fragmented insights, such as three cars were shipped east Saturday night in September. The November 1, 1895 paper offered, "W.P. Hall, the rustling horse dealer, shipped six cars of horses from this point Saturday night. One load was billed to Hamburg, Germany, one to London, England, two to Philadelphia, one to Chicago and one to St. Louis. Ben Hall accompanied the former loads as far as New York."

In ads in the local newspapers in November Hall stated he would buy any horses that were fat and well broken, weigh between 600 and two thousand pounds and between three and thirty-three years old. The first week of December saw six cars of horses shipped from Lancaster to various locations with two of them going to Germany. George Bush accompanied the horses during their travels until they were delivered safely in Germany.

While Hall dealt with large sales barns, he also worked with the common man who came to him to buy and sell two or four horses or mules. He paid a fair price for all the horses and mules he bought during his thirty-five plus years in business. While the Hall Papers show a few disgruntled buyers in the circus business, they almost always came back and bought again.

While many Lancaster newspapers from 1896 are missing, some issues do survive. One of the most revealing snippets was a statement on January 24, 1896 that Bert McClain was now in the employ of W. P. Hall. The year 1896 had one other unique event. Hall lost a court case in Circuit Court in January to Susan F. Stratton for \$1000. Billy was a co-defendant with Clarence York. The judgment, however, did not reveal what the case was about.

In February of 1896, one of those rotten little horse trader stories surfaced when Hall was arrested for assault and battery on another horse trader. Both men had attended the same horse sale earlier. A Mr. Champ had the local Marshall in Centerville, Iowa take out a warrant against Hall. When he appeared before Justice Thorp to face the charges, he was found guilty, fined \$20 and went merrily on his way.

The horse business was a continual grind of buying and shipping and selling and shipping livestock. Birney Dysart accompanied two carloads of horses to Chicago in March where he stayed a few days with his brother before returning to the Lancaster area. Hall made good use of local farm hands who knew their animals. The men he employed were given the chance of a lifetime to travel to places

some had never even heard about before, let alone visited. His employees eventually traveled across to Europe and Africa more times than most of us today ever will.

Hall's operation also meant that in addition to handling equines, he needed to feed, water and clean up after them. Area farmers had the largest buyer of hay, corn and oats in the Midwest right in their backyards. They knew they could sell all they produced to Billy Hall. It doesn't take long to see how large an economic boon Hall was becoming to the surrounding area.

A note in the *Lancaster Excelsior* on August 7, 1896, stated that Sarah Hall was quite sick at the Grand Central Hotel. Since returning from Richmond in March of 1895, she had apparently been residing at the hotel in downtown Lancaster.

Billy kept up the horse sales throughout the country as he was



In 1905 Hall took out his own circus, a mistake he never repeated. This illustration is of a portion of a herald. Pfening Archives.

shipping seven cars of horses out of Lancaster in early January of 1897. Hall began to slowly buy more land. Sometimes he also sold property. In January 1897 the local papers recorded that he sold three acres to George McClaskey for \$1000.

Bert McClain, who was becoming a better businessman all the time, left for Duluth, where he took charge of a horse stable for Hall for over two months before returning to Lancaster in January of 1897. Billy and Sarah bought the Arnold property in Lancaster, just north of the town square in early February 1897. They moved into this house shortly after a little cleaning and fixing up. Billy sent another two cars of horses overseas again in early February of 1897 with London being the destination this time. Billy's horse buying took him to all different regional markets. Chicago was usually a good place to buy quality horses. The town had been good to him as had St. Louis and many other towns. In Chicago he bought 125 export chunks and drivers in one day as well as shipping three car-loads of horses to Germany in February.

In one of those rare announcements saved by the Hall family, we can ascertain the family ties that kept the horse business running in an invitation to attend the sale of Heavy Draught Horses, Bussers, Trammers and Vanners at the Elephant and Castle in London, England on March 15, 1897. The Hall brothers offered these fine specimens. With Louis Hall in Europe and Billy Hall in the United States, they made a go of this terrific opportunity. They later collaborated on an operation in Cape Town, South Africa.

By the first week of March, Hall had shipped horses to the Chicago area, Richmond, Duluth, and Germany. While the actual destinations are unknown, we do know that Hall shipped thirteen cars

of horses from Lancaster to eastern markets in March 1897. Hall had several people in his employment by this time. We find George Bush, Polk Payton, Homer Thatcher, Ben Hall, Joe Hall, Louis Hall, and another man we will hear a lot about later, Bert McClain. Cousins Ben, Joe, and later their brother Theodore Hall from Milton, Iowa all worked for Billy Hall. While we cannot be absolutely certain when Hall saw the African trade as something he wanted to pursue, in late May, he announced in the local newspapers that he was not buying any more horses at that time as he was preparing a shipment of mules to go to South Africa. He personally took them. Louis left Hamburg on June 10, 1897 aboard the *Furst Bismarck* heading for New York.

In October of 1897, Hall had another 100 mules ready to go to Africa. McClain accompanied the load to New York where they departed on a steamer. In early December of 1897, 75 more mules headed to South Africa with Polk Payton accompanying the load. Billy used a very simple letterhead by the 1890's that stated in the upper left hand corner "W. P. Hall - The Most Extensive Dealer in Horses and Mules in The World."

Was Billy Hall famous? That's a question that arises when James Nichols of Lancaster was arrested in Keokuk, Iowa for forgery. It seems that Nichols had gotten some blank checks and left the Lancaster area where he started writing checks signed as Wm. P. Hall for Lou Hall. Spending money like crazy, this young man was arrested soon after as someone wised up and called the law. His intention to cheat was overwhelmed by his intention to impress. Everyone recognized Wm. P. Hall. Many called him "Plug Hat Hall" for the elaborate clothing and stove top hat he was always wearing. A William P. Hall, James Nichols was not!

While the wild west may have been conquered, thievery wasn't. While Hall rode in his light buggy from Milton, Iowa toward Eldon, Iowa in March 1898, he was accosted by two masked bandits. With weapons drawn, they demanded that he stop and give over his money. Hall stopped, but put up a fight, whereby he was pistol whipped and left unconscious. The robbers made off with over \$1800 that he had just withdrawn from the Bank in Milton before departing.

Louis Hall was staying at the White House Hotel in Cape Town, South Africa when he wrote on May 18, 1898 that his cablegram could not be received in Lancaster and that Billy should register a name there such as "Horseman." Stories were told that Hall wore \$20,000 of diamonds as cufflinks, stick pins and tie tacks, in addition to a ring that would give him the moniker of "Diamond Billy." Since we have already found him wearing a diamond stud in his 1894 check images, we have to wonder where, when and how all the diamonds he had were acquired. South Africa certainly harvests a great majority of them.

While we cannot be 100% certain when the Hall Stables actually opened in Cape Town, another invitation saved by the family announced a sale of 30 mules at Messrs. J. J. Hofmeyer and Son on April 20, 1898. The invitation was signed by the Hall Bros. By June 5, Louis wrote Billy from Cape Town thanking him for the fine bunch of horses and mares he had sent him. Louis wrote to Billy that this would be the making of "us" in this country.

On August 10, 1898, Louis wrote to Billy from the Hall Bros. Stables located at 74, Longmarket Street in Cape Town, saying a ship had just arrived from South America with 300 horses and 400 mules on it, flooding the market. They established the Hall's Horse & Carriage Repository at 30 Darling Street in Cape Town sometime in 1900. This turned out to be Louis' permanent home in life. He eventually married and started a family in South Africa. Louis and his family remained in South Africa for the rest of his life ex-

## THE GREAT WM. P. HALL SHOWS

Lithograph Order, Car 2 No. 5337

1905.  
I have this day leased to the above-named Shows, full  
and exclusive permission to display \_\_\_\_\_ Lithographs  
at No. \_\_\_\_\_ street,  
and to remain undisturbed until after the date of the  
above-named Shows at \_\_\_\_\_  
In consideration of the above, I have this day re-  
ceived an order, bearing duplicate number and date  
to this contract, which will pass \_\_\_\_\_ persons.  
This Order is Not Transferable, and no other Litho-  
graphs will be allowed in my windows until after date  
above named.

Owner or Agent.

The highest single figure  
or number in this column  
indicates the number  
of persons this order  
will admit AT ONE TIME ONLY

AV/



No. 5337

NOTE—This order is of no money  
value and is also null and void  
when used for purposes other than  
designated, and in no case will it  
be recognized unless the contract  
for which it was given has been  
strictly carried out.

## THE GREAT WM. P. HALL SHOWS

Order for Admission, Lithograph Order, Car 2

On presentation of this order you will please grant \_\_\_\_\_ admis-  
sions **only** to your Exhibition in consideration of the EXCLUSIVE  
privilege of displaying \_\_\_\_\_ Lithographs in his windows at \_\_\_\_\_  
street city of \_\_\_\_\_  
until date of Show.

Manager

This order for admission must always be ready for presentation  
when called for. **No Half-Tickets Allowed.**

AV/

Form used to track passes given to individuals and companies for allowing the Hall show to post lithographs on their property. Pfening Archives.

cept for numerous trips back to Lancaster over the years.

The Hall Papers show him selling twenty-one horses for \$1527.90 in May 1898 through the John Kirk Stables in St. Louis. A few ads from New York newspapers describe a working relationship between Hall and J. M. Griffin who was having a huge sale of horses in the stables of the Radney House in Auburn, New York in November 1898. George Newkirk was the auctioneer. These auctions can be documented for at least another year and a half. With the Boer War in full swing by this time, Hall shipped horses to Auburn where the thirteenth car of Missouri horses arrived in February of 1900 to supply the Meng horse business in Philadelphia, the American Express Company out west, European sales outlets, in the Minnesota region as well as all the war horses in South Africa. Hall saw his vision of bigger and greater things coming each and every day. His reputation was growing abundantly in larger sales markets all the time.

The Oceanic Steamship Co. contracted to haul 22 mules and four horses to Honolulu, Hawaii on November 9, 1898. The Sloan, Nims & Bratton horse dealership at the National Stock Yards in Illinois advised dealers that they needed big work horses to export for their September 21, 1899 sale. By 1899, the Boer War had broken out in South Africa. Hall was summoned to supply the British with war horses. His sales barn in Cape Town was paying off already. Later estimates indicated about 200,000 horses and mules were used in the Boer War. Horses and mules were in large demand in South Africa and it wasn't until the Boer War ended in 1902 that the mule trade became bigger than the horses. The mules worked in the diamond mines because they were smaller animals than horses. Ed Shepherd had left Lancaster for South Africa, arriving there on February 28. He rested and returned to the United States just in time to go back in May of 1899 with 50 mules heading to Lou Hall for Billy.

The year 1899 was a hugely memorable. The Billy Hall cigar was introduced in July 1899 with a picture of Billy on the box. They were sold locally at the Hayes Drug Store. George Bush had returned from Cape Town where had just made his seventh trip with horses and mules and Polk Payton returned from Cape Town after making his fifth trip with horses and mules for Hall. Bert McClain was in Oklahoma for several weeks

Fire was a great concern at the time. Unfortunately for the town of Lancaster, a fire broke out that consumed several businesses in the downtown square. The fire was so intense that there was fear that the Stretch Livery Stables might catch fire as well. Hall's 300 horses were run out of the barn where they were stabled and taken to a pasture north of town to avoid the fire.

He shipped seventeen carloads of horses out of Lancaster the third week of January. In late February, Louis Hall returned from Cape Town after several months there to visit with his brother Billy. After having stayed in the Lancaster area for only a few days, by early March 1900 Lou had gathered more horses and mules for the trip back to South Africa. Billy made a trip overseas in March. He is found on a manifest of alien immigrants arriving back in Boston on April 24 on the *S.S. Columbia*, having left London ten days earlier. I can only assume that he was returning from Germany or South Africa as both locations departed from London. The June 1910 United States Census listed Hall as a horse buyer.

When Web Farrell of Farrell and Mills dropped a well on the Hall stables property water gushed upwards, shooting as high as 200 feet. He had already dug up some particles from a vein of coal that seemed to indicate a good bit of coal of good quality. This coal would be of some hope to all Lancaster residents later on.

Hall was blessed with the birth of his second daughter, Wilma Francis Hall, on October 9, 1901. His horse business continued to prosper. This required traveling to surrounding areas to hit all the livery stables and sales barns. Undated letters in the Hall Papers indicate a sale by Hall of horses named Ben Harrison and Grover Cleveland along with thirteen other horses and thirty mules for \$5500. George Meng sold 21 horses for \$2325 in Philadelphia. A small note in a 1902 the *Bloomfield (Iowa) Democrat* said that Hall purchased eleven car loads of horses in less than eight hours. People from as far away as Maine were buying Hall's excellent quality of horses for use in logging camps.

As business grew, it became apparent that Hall needed more

Hall sold animals to the Boer War show at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

C. F. G. MEYER, SR.,  
PRESIDENT.

GENERAL BEN VILJOEN,  
VICE-PRESIDENT.

C. F. G. MEYER, JR.,  
SECY AND TREAS.

## SOUTH AFRICAN BOER WAR EXHIBITION COMPANY.

(INCORPORATED).

CAPITAL STOCK, \$250,000.

OFFICES, 1222-1223 CHEMICAL BUILDING.

ST. LOUIS, MO. May 4, 1904.

barns for his livestock. Since he had more horses than barn space, he knew he had to expand somehow, somewhere. He made contact with Joe Manning, a man who knew his way around the construction trades. Joe built seven barns north of the town square on the Hall farm. The first barn was measured out at 35' x 130'. This barn had a brick basement. Years later, this would be referred to as the "cellar." The other barns were used for horses, one for mules, one for equipment, and one as an animal hospital.<sup>11</sup>

George Bush returned to South Africa for Billy Hall a few more times. When he returned to the United States in November 1902, it was the culmination of his 10th trip with horses and mules to Cape Town for Hall. Bert McClain had established himself as a fine horse man and was constantly buying horses for Hall. While some places a ways from Lancaster, such as Chicago or St. Louis, provided horses, the great majority of the horses and mules came locally from the sales barns in Centerville, Iowa; Kirksville and Memphis,



With his hat at a jaunty angle, Hall poses about 1905 for a family portrait with his daughters Sydney (l.) and Wilma (r.) and wife Sarah in front. Inexplicably, his son, William P. Hall, Jr., isn't in the picture. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

business, he specialized in quality horse displays. So hearing of the good horses that Hall was buying and selling, Wallace sent him a letter on January 29, 1903 asking to meet at the Chicago Stockyards. Once they met, they could go to Lancaster together and look over the stock. This turned out to be a fruitful endeavor for Hall as this meeting brought a good sale of horses. In what would turn out to be a rather common pattern over the years, a good transaction one time was followed by a complaint the next, only to have the customer turn around and do business with Hall again. Such was the case with Wallace when he received \$100 from Billy to apparently help ease the anguish of a particular sale. He wrote back to Hall on May 7, 1903 and made mention that the next time they would try them all first.

The citizens of the Lancaster community got real excited about the possibility of mining for coal on some of Hall's property north of the square early in 1903. While digging a well two years earlier, the well diggers had hit

Missouri; Bloomfield, Iowa and others. Most were within a 50 mile radius of Lancaster.

A letter to Hall from his brother Louis on January 7, 1903 was full of depressing news and Louis's feeling that they should give up and get out of the Cape Town market as he had nothing worth selling. *The Ottumwa Weekly Courier* told of a local farmer selling his team to "Diamond Bill" Hall in its January 26, 1903 issue. This is the earliest mention in print I have found of the "Diamond Bill(y)" moniker.

Ben Wallace was a country boy who grew up knowing good horse flesh when he saw it. After he entered the circus business,

he specialized in quality horse displays. So hearing of the good horses that Hall was buying and selling, Wallace sent him a letter on January 29, 1903 asking to meet at the Chicago Stockyards. Once they met, they could go to Lancaster together and look over the stock. This turned out to be a fruitful endeavor for Hall as this meeting brought a good sale of horses. In what would turn out to be a rather common pattern over the years, a good transaction one time was followed by a complaint the next, only to have the customer turn around and do business with Hall again. Such was the case with Wallace when he received \$100 from Billy to apparently help ease the anguish of a particular sale. He wrote back to Hall on May 7, 1903 and made mention that the next time they would try them all first.

The citizens of the Lancaster community got real excited about the possibility of mining for coal on some of Hall's property north of the square early in 1903. While digging a well two years earlier, the well diggers had hit

a vein of coal estimated to be about eighteen inches thick. While very little is written about this mining opportunity, the Hall papers have numerous photos of mining operations taken in Missouri. Hall shipped five cars of horses to eastern markets during the first week of February 1903. He advertised ahead of himself to let others know he would be there buying that day. Occasionally Hall's announcement indicated he was only looking for a certain size or weight horse.

The *Ottumwa Courier* in Ottumwa, Iowa carried an ad for "Diamond Bill" Hall the celebrated Horse Buyer" who was to be at the Chisholm Bros. and Burton's sales barn on February 16. The ad went on to say he was looking for 200 good horses and mares all weighing 1200 pounds and up and from 4 to 10 years of age. While visiting the Bloomfield, Iowa sales barns in early February, he bought 224 horses before four o'clock in the afternoon which totaled over \$25,000 to the local horse sellers. He then bought 177 head of horses in Bloomfield, Iowa on March 30th and had all of them delivered by rail to Lancaster the next day. While selling horses and mules right and left, he improved his residence by having brick walks put around the house. Three cars of horses and mules headed off to Cape Town, again in July, accompanied on this trip by Theodore Hall.

In what has to be one of the most interesting short news articles ever written about Hall, the *Humeston (Iowa) New Era* published a report on June 10, 1903 "that Billy Hall, the noted horse buyer, has decided to embark in the Circus Business." The article went on to say that it would be a one ring affair with no reserved seats and horses would be a specialty of the show. Any boy ten years old or younger who had no money would be admitted free. The show never opened. It would be interesting to find out how the press got wind of such an idea. Since Hall was very good at keeping the press informed about his business, we have to wonder if he was actually thinking circus in 1903, a year before buying his first circus.

A letter from Louis Hall dated August 13, 1903 told a completely different story than the one in January as he had sent Billy \$10,000 and hoped to be sending more very soon. Louis was getting some competition from a couple other traders, but he was still talking to customers and taking orders. He told Billy that had the mules been a little bit bigger he would have sold them all.

Hall made arrangements in January 1904 to send a car of horses to South Africa, accompanying a rancher's load of cattle going there. Having met Ben Wallace for the first time the previous year Billy had the circus firmly embedded into his mind. So great was the potential horse market in the circus business that he probably was amazed that he hadn't gotten into it before. He took an ad in the *New York Clipper* of January 30, 1904 that told the circus world he had 1500 to 2000 horses on his property at all times and that he

Letterhead from the William P. Hall's Magnificent Shows. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.



could furnish any kind of horse.

Hall's well established horse trade was about to make another major spurt in growth. On February 2, 1904, the South African Boer War Exhibition Company at the St. Louis World's Fair sent a letter to Hall inquiring about the purchase of 400 head of horses between 13.3 and 14.3 hands high, all to be sound in sight and good condition, broken to saddle and not more than 12 years of age. All horses would be inspected by Art Lewis, general manager before shipment to St. Louis. The Exhibition would pay \$75 per horse.<sup>12</sup>

The *Schuylerville County Republican* of March 4, 1904 stated that Hall had shipped in 156 horses in seven cars the previous Saturday. As reported on March 18, 1904, Hall had been buying horses for five hours straight at the McVey livery barn in Downing, Missouri where he bought 104 horses for just a little over \$11,000.

The May 7, 1904 contract between the South African Boer War Exhibition Company Incorporated and Hall stated that the Boer War Co. bought 375 horses and 20 mules from him on May 6, 1904. They drew up a contract to "SELL, ASSIGN, TRANSFER, AND SET OVER unto the said Wm. P. Hall all the horses and mules." The Boer War Co. paid \$15,000 to Hall on \$5,000 notes due on June 1, July 1, and August 1, 1904 at 6 percent interest. They would also keep the horses and mules for use at the Louisiana Purchase Gardens also known as the St. Louis World's Fair. Hall would be able to sell the stock for failure of payment with a three day notice but the sale of stock could only be held in St. Louis.<sup>13</sup>

We also have found that once the Boer War Exhibition closed in St. Louis that the entire cast and company came to Lancaster. The show was going on the road. Although there doesn't seem to be any concrete documentation, news articles stated that the English and Dutch soldiers in the troupe couldn't get along with each other and the troupe disbanded leaving it all at the Hall farm.

#### THE CIRCUS BUSINESS

While the horse trade was a sure thing at the time, Hall's interest in exotic animals had been slowly growing since his travels to Europe and Germany several years earlier. Hall's connection with the St. Louis World's Fair allowed him the opportunity to meet and talk to the Carl Hagenbeck people. It was here that Hall bought his first elephant, Mary, along with a camel named Duke. A large variety of exotic animals were found in the circus menagerie. With that in mind and hard times falling on one circus in particular, a deal was reached between Charles Wilson, the owner of the World Famous Nickel Plate Shows, which was out of money in Sebree, Kentucky on August 28, 1904, and Hall to buy the circus for \$10,000. Hall bought four coaches, three flatcars, eight wagons, twenty-five horses and harness, twenty-three ponies

and harness, other animals and contents just as used when the show closed.<sup>14</sup> (These flatcars were still of the wooden variety and were somewhere between forty and sixty feet long. Thus, the eight wagons filled the three flatcars.) By September 24, 1904, the *Billboard* reported that Hall was taking out a show the next year but that he did not buy the Nickel Plate title.

Billy had the show transported to Lancaster and held it for about two weeks before reaching an agreement with M. S. McGrew who acted as a go between for Robert and Richard Schiller. Another ad appeared in the September 24, 1904 *Billboard* saying the Harris Nickel Plate Shows was opening September 30 and looking for good help. "Contact the show at Lancaster, Missouri." This adventure never left the barns. To hold a circus train for very long, a siding was needed. Hall contracted with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to put in almost 1500 feet of spur track a little northwest of the Railroad Station in Lancaster. The railroad depot was due west of downtown Lancaster. The Hall farm was due north of town. The siding and farm were only about 10 city blocks away from each other. The complete show, having been bought from Hall, remained in Lancaster the entire winter where work was done on framing a new show. The wagons were painted and re-lettered using the new title of Cook and Barrett Circus. It opened in Lancaster on April 22, 1905.<sup>15</sup>

The *Schuylerville County Republican* reported on December 2, 1904 that Hall had received two apes and a large monkey. They were upstairs in the old W. F. Mitchell office. The next week the *Republican* told of Hall buying two lions and expecting them soon. The animal trade was starting to grow very quickly.

The Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Circus went on the auction block in Columbus, Ohio on January 10, 1905. Hall attended, hoping to buy more circus equipment and animals. Right before bidding began the auctioneer asked if anyone wanted to buy the complete circus. James A. Bailey certainly did. With the show completely sold, Hall ended up with nothing.

Also attending the sale was another showman by the name of Walter L. Main. He started talking to Hall about buying circus items, not recognizing Hall's name or

knowing of his reputation. He offered his entire circus for sale for \$30,000. To Main's surprise, Billy took him up on the opportunity and gave him a \$10,000 down payment in cash right then. Main felt that he had pulled a good one and just pocketed the \$10,000, thinking that was the last of this Hall guy. Billy had other ideas and went to Geneva, Ohio just a couple days later with the rest of the money to complete the deal. Walter Main was taken aback and tried to get out of the deal, but his attorney told him he had accepted the down payment which constituted a sale. Hall now owned his second circus.<sup>16</sup>

One man who worked for Hall became his right hand man for many years and then helped the family after Billy's death in 1932. Riley Bert McClain was a wise horse man in his own right and under Hall's direction was learning all about the exotic animal trade as well. The *Schuylerville Republican* stated on January 13, 1905 that McClain had just returned from St. Louis where he had been for several days purchasing two elephants, six camels and other animals for his show. By sorting all these dates out, we find that McClain was buying animals before Hall bought the Walter L. Main Circus on January 10. I have enjoyed following elephants' life stories for years, but it is mind boggling at times. Such is the case of the Hall elephant herds. All that can be said at this point is that Hall now owned three elephants, Mary, and the two McClain purchased.

A classic sign of Hall's business practices was stated in the *Schuylerville Republican* on February 3, 1905 when it reported that Hall had sold his entire menagerie of animals in winter quarters. His main show was in Geneva, Ohio. We don't know to whom he sold what, but he cleaned house. Did this include the elephants? Again, we don't know.

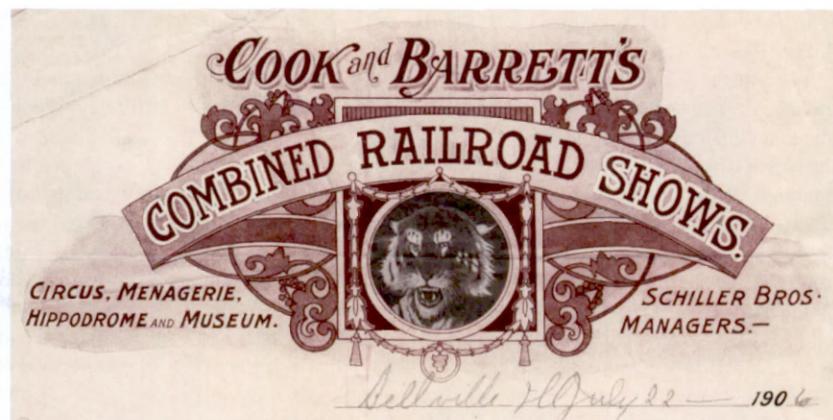
#### THE GREAT WILLIAM P. HALL SHOWS

Not wanting to waste any time, Hall started shopping around for equipment for his show. He talked with Andrew Downie and they worked out an agreement whereby Hall got the calliope from the Andrew Downie New Big One Ring Show in exchange for horses Downie needed in the spring. While the letter was written on January 10, 1905 on the show letterhead that listed the permanent winter quarters in Medina, New York, the show was still on the road out in the Northwest Territory. Downie was contemplating the route to head east as the railroads were failing.<sup>17</sup>

*Billboard*, the leading trade journal of the time, covered the activities in preparing the Great Wm. P. Hall shows in the Walter L. Main quarters in Geneva, Ohio. Under the direction of Phil Ellsworth and Superintendent McCormick, the wagons were all painted and re-lettered. New rail cars arrived from the Youngstown Car Company. Wardrobe for the show was fashioned in the first floor of a large corner block building in Lancaster where 25 ladies were employed. A ring barn was established in Lancaster where Professor Bert Mayo trained the horses. Acts were arriving from Europe and other locations. Kitty Kruger was riding in fine style. Elsie St. Leon was practicing her equestrienne somersaulting act daily. Orrin Hollis was busy practicing his principal riding act and somersaults with his steed, Chief.

While every move that Billy made was not recorded, Lancaster had two weekly newspapers. The *Schuylerville Republican* and the *Lancaster Excelsior* blessed us historians with all the tidbits and articles they published over the years. Just in the first three months of 1905, I found these various references: "J.C. Mills and W.P. Hall are in Geneva, Ohio looking after Hall's show interests. Wm. P. Hall bought 10 carloads of horses in Bloomfield, Iowa. Bert McClain and Ben Hall are buying horses in Weldon, Iowa. Bert McClain is buying horses for Mr. Hall in Osceola, Iowa. Bert McClain was in Cainsville, Iowa buying horses for Mr. Hall. Ben Wallace was in town and bought a carload of horses for the Wallace Shows. Bert McClain accepted a position on the Wm. P. Hall Shows as a front door man. Wm. P. Hall had received a large Bengal tiger from the Hagenbecks."

By April 7, 1905, McClain was in Memphis buying horses. The



Bob and Dick Schiller tried it again with Cook and Barrett in 1906. This time the show closed in May. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

Walter L. Main show arrived in Lancaster according to the *Schuylerville Republican* of April 7. A terrifically detailed article in the *Keokuk (Iowa) Gate City* on April 7, 1905 described the Hall show train passing through town: "A real circus train, with its attractively painted cars, glittering cages, seat wagons, canvas wagons, animals and other paraphernalia was in Keokuk last night. It was the Great Wm. P. Hall Show from Geneva, Ohio. This was the former headquarters when owned by Walter L. Main, now en route to Lancaster, Missouri, its future home. The train was composed of six stock cars, ten flats, and four coaches, and the two advance cars that will herald the coming of this gigantic amusement company. ..." The April 14 *Schuylerville Republican* noted that McClain had left for New York to secure an elephant for the Hall show. The paper was almost correct. The William Bartels wild animal importing company had offered elephants for \$1000 each. Hall bought five of them. These were supposed to be baby elephants imported after April 10. By May 1, the Bartels organization billed Hall \$12.50 for the man hours required to care for these five elephants.<sup>18</sup>

*Billboard* noted that the Wm. P. Hall sideshows would be under the direction of Phil Ellsworth. The performance would consist of 20 top notch acts. No freaks, all beauties. J. Frances Kane would be the principal talker with three assistants. Entertaining on the inside would be H. Quaille Clark and his Plantation Minstrels and Creole Bells.

The former Walter L. Main show left Geneva with a new paint job announcing the Great Wm. P. Hall Shows. While Hall himself did not travel with the train, J.C. Mills did. He was a banker and a lawyer in Lancaster who was now Mr. Hall's business manager.<sup>19</sup> No sooner had the Hall train arrived in Lancaster than the show was ready to roll on out. The #1 advance car had C. R. Coleman as manager. B.R. Wheeler was in charge of paper; C. Carey was the assistant, W. E. Johnson, H. Meuth, J. H. Johnson, Gus Grey, L. Moore, W. K. Miller, O. Wiley, O. E. Essinger, E. C. Hopper, H. Mason, C. Graves, B. F. Deschane, W. E. Nunn, Tom Hill, Lou Donnelly, and Ben Dash were billposters, J. McKinnon was the programmer. C. Anderson, P. Brush, and Z. Luckensmeyer posted lithos, and R. Ripon was the car porter.<sup>20</sup> The #1 advance car left Lancaster on April 20, 1905 en route to Centerville, Iowa, the show's second date after the home town opening.

The #2 advance car was managed by Fred Hessler. Tony Hannum was the head billposter with Marvin Neis, A. G. Vermette, DeWitt Evans, Wm. Miller, V. D. Williams, L. E. Nichols, "Doc" Ingram, and Frank Mills as assistants. Charles Mohr had banners;

F. E. Swaby was lithographer; O. L. Smith was programmer; and Arthur Russell was the porter.<sup>21</sup>

The season opener for the Great Wm. P. Hall Shows took place in Lancaster on April 29. On May 5 it was reported that the five elephants had arrived for the show.<sup>22</sup> After careful examination of the offers being made by both Louis Ruhe and Bartels, the five elephants were purchased from Bartels. Coming out of New York, the elephants, which had already cost Hall \$1000 each, required feed and care for which Hall was billed an additional \$25 before they all arrived in Lancaster.<sup>23</sup> A May 12 newspaper told of the snake den being tipped over while loading, causing considerable damage. The May 26 *Lancaster Excelsior* reported one of Hall's men had been mashed up by some of the elephants and returned home to Lancaster. The weather jumped on them immediately. After leaving Centerville, the show traveled to Bloomfield, Iowa where it rained so hard the train was not unloaded. The next day in Mt. Pleasant, only one performance was given due to rain. Right after leaving Centerville, the show had an elephant and a horse die.<sup>24</sup> While this wasn't the start Hall had hoped for, it would get better.

The Great Wm. P. Hall shows established a general office at 67 South Clark Street in Chicago, which was being operated by the excursion agent G. H. Robinson. He stated that the last two weeks business had been top notch. The advance work was being highly noticed everywhere they went.<sup>25</sup> By June 2, Hall left his show to get back to the horse and mule business. He returned to Lancaster to oversee the shipment of 200 horses and mules to South Africa.<sup>26</sup> He sent a carload of horses to Philadelphia as reported in the *Lancaster Excelsior* of July 14, 1905.<sup>27</sup>

The Hall show carried some big name entertainers. The St. Leons were there along with principal riders LaBellea and Kitty Kruger. Orrin Hollis was a principal rider and Ed and Maud Millette were there also. Performer Harry Clark was an Eagles member who did much recruiting for the fraternal organization. He was able to bring in twenty of the show folks to the Eagles. While showing in Mexico, Missouri over a hundred members of the Eagles attended the show. Hall granted them all free admission, and then entertained the group after the show.

The shows management consisted of William P. Hall, sole owner; Phil Ellsworth, show manager; W. F. Rice, auditor; cousin Ben Hall, treasurer; James McElroy, 24 hour man; W. R. Musgat, general agent; Al. J. Gillingham, manager of privileges and legal adjuster; R. J. Parvin Jr., press representative; "Eagle" Cory, lighting superintendent; Thomas Fay, boss canvas man; Frank McCormick, superintendent; Whitney Lykins, boss hostler; Mark Monroe, boss animal man; Tom King, side show canvas; Professor Mayo, equestrienne director; George Atkinson, concert manager and announcer; Bert McClain, chief ticket seller; and Mrs. McCormick, wardrobe mistress.<sup>28</sup>

As a side note, the Cook and Barrett Circus opened in the spring after having been in Lancaster all winter. In addition to all of the professionals that signed on the show, there were a number of locals who went with it. Earl Mitchell left as a clown. George Grist, Jr. went as a band member. Jap Boone and his son Cooter, Charles Grant, Edgar Welsh, Albert Evans, Henson Manning and Tom Starnes all joined as the generally useful laborers.<sup>29</sup>

The Great Wm. P. Hall Show also had a number of local folks travelling with it. In addition to the Hall family and McClain, W. F. Rice was show treasurer; Henry Eichmere handled the tickets at the gate along with McClain; John B. Hulen, Earl Murphy, and Joe Yates were gate keepers and ticket collectors. William Schafer, Elmer Welsch, Brad Geery, Arch Geery and Fred Altes were all laborers.<sup>30</sup>

The show suffered a small train wreck at Moberly, Missouri on Friday June, 2. While the train wasn't apparently messed up, one water wagon and a stable wagon were reportedly destroyed.<sup>31</sup> Hall, always the horse man, bought fifty head of horses for an average of \$250 a head when his show played Sedalia, Missouri.<sup>32</sup> The show continued to do good business as its route took it straight into the wheat belt of the Midwest where a very good crop was hoped for.

The show train gave them problems again en route to Carrollton, Missouri from Atkinson, Kansas. This time one of the sets of trucks or train wheels gave them fits. Repairs were made to allow the show to reach Carrollton by noon. The parade didn't begin until 4:00 p. m. and the afternoon show was late. Even with rain, a fairly good crowd was reported in the afternoon and a big one at night.<sup>33</sup>

The weather got the better part of them in Richmond, Missouri on July 3 when rain and high winds allowed only one performance in the afternoon to a very good crowd. The July fourth celebration was held in St. Joseph, Missouri. The show arrived late due to terrible weather, but gave a grand parade at 12:30 p. m., then packed the house in the afternoon with a good crowd at night. The evening audience was smaller due to competition from a big fireworks show.<sup>34</sup>

In the tradition of many show people, the Hall show's cast accompanied by Gregory's Famous Italian Band marched out to the gravesite of Fayette "Yankee" Robinson while in Jefferson, Iowa on July 9. Phil Ellsworth related a brief history of Robinson's career. It was noted that the Forepaugh and Ringling people had erected a fitting tombstone on his grave.<sup>35</sup>

It comes as no surprise to find him shipping an average of four cars of horses a week from Lancaster even with his show on the road.<sup>36</sup> A good horse man and a faithful employee named Henry Eichmere ran the Lancaster operation for Hall.

While all accounts had indicated fairly good business, the show reported it would close August 30 due to the fever epidemic sweeping through the South. *Billboard* indicated this was just the first of many shows expected to close due to the fever.

By early August, Mrs. Hall and the children along with her sister-in-law, Mrs. Joe Hall, all returned to Lancaster after having spent the last three months on the show. Lou Hall returned from Africa aboard the ship the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* on August 2, 1905, arriving in New York after sailing from Southampton, England. Louis joined the Great Wm. P. Hall Shows in Unionville, Iowa.

Violence broke out on the lot in Bloomfield, Iowa when a crowd of local ruffians attacked the show. The "Hey Rube" that followed severely injured one of the townsmen which resulted in a lawsuit. With the coming of a new year, Henry Eichmere, Bert McClain, W. F. Rice, and John Reeves found themselves all in a Bloomfield courtroom defending the actions of the circus.<sup>37</sup>

After the show closed, Ed and Maud Millette joined the Forepaugh show to finish their season. Back in the horse business full-time again, Hall shipped 153 of his show horses to South Africa. Here his brother Lou started a Hippodrome Show. Eugene Buck, Barney Crooks, Bert Mayo, and Whitey Larkins all went with the horses.<sup>38</sup>

With his circus closed, Hall leased his performing elephants and his steam calliope to the Schiller brothers' Cook and Barrett Circus to enhance their show the rest of the season.<sup>39</sup> The additional animals and wagon joined the show at Albamont, Missouri. Just a day or so later, the Schillers closed in Harrisonville. They wired Hall to say they were broke and stranded. Hall sent W. F. Rice to take charge of the mortgage and bring the show back to Lancaster where it arrived on Wednesday October 19, 1905.<sup>40</sup> By mid-November, McClain was out buying horses again and traveled to Centerville, Iowa to look around. Now that the Great Wm. P. Hall show was off

the road, Billy again contracted with the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to build another 1500 feet of spur track adjacent to the existing spur track built the previous November behind the railroad station. This gave him track storage for about fifty railroad cars as most rail cars were still wooden in design and not more than sixty feet long.<sup>41</sup>

### HORSE SENSE AND CIRCUS SALES 1906

Ben Wallace came to Lancaster on January 1, 1906 to look at some horses for the Great Wallace Shows. He stayed overnight with the Hall family as their guest. He was satisfied with what he saw and returned to Peru, Indiana where he sent a letter on January 5 to Hall ordering 93 horses.<sup>42</sup> The beginning of 1906 saw seven car loads of horses shipped into Lancaster. Representatives from the Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows were in town buying horses. After they had made their careful selections, the Buffalo Bill show had 88 horses shipped to its quarters in Jersey City, New Jersey.<sup>43</sup> The Sells and Downs Circus was placed up for sale at auction in Birmingham, Alabama at Smith's Park on January 16 and 17. In a letter dated January 2, to Hall on a Sells and Downs letterhead, the entire show inventory was listed in detail.

Everyone else in show business knew the Sells and Downs show was for sale as well. Gordon Lillie, known professionally as Pawnee Bill, wrote to Hall on January 9 inquiring about the possibility of buying the Hall elephants. He didn't wait for an answer and sent another letter on January 12 trying to buy five elephants and two "Pilipino" bulls for \$7650. He wanted an immediate wire from Hall as the Sells and Downs elephants were for sale if Hall wouldn't sell his.

While *Billboard* was one of the two major entertainment publications at the time, it occasionally reported stories wrong, leading us to not believe everything written in it. An example of bad reporting occurred in the issue of January 20, 1906 in which it was stated that the Hall show had a very satisfactory season in 1905 and would be "larger and better in every way." The very next week, Hall placed an ad simultaneously in *Billboard* and *New York Clipper* offering his entire circus for sale. Included were twenty-two or thirty cars,

to suit purchaser, twenty-five cages of animals, and five elephants along with ring stock and baggage horses.<sup>44</sup>

The *Schuylerville Republican* had a small notice in its January 26 edition saying Hall had shipped two of his elephants to a purchaser in Memrose, Iowa. It is uncertain which elephants they were, where they went or if there was

In 1909 Hall bought this once-magnificent cottage cage from the John Robinson Circus. No evidence exists that it ever left the property. Photo taken in 1932 as part of the Ralph Hadley set, Pfening Archives.

even a sale. It might have been a lease for a period of time.

Gordon Lillie again wrote to Hall on January 29 offering his entire cookhouse, wagon with refrigerator and first class ranges, two tops and the capabilities of serving 350 to 400 people daily for two thousand dollars. We don't know if this offer was taken up by Hall or not.<sup>45</sup>

The circus animals started disappearing fast after the ad was

placed. The Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated Shows out of Fairbury, Nebraska bought four camels, two tigers, a zebra, several cages of birds and monkeys, several wagons, seats, tents, and poles.<sup>46</sup>

Hall was starting to get involved in the elephant business. He found one elephant in New York that could be purchased immediately. Basil was a huge male Asian elephant that had spent many a year on the Adam Forepaugh show. Now privately owned by Dr. M. J. Potter, Billy agreed to purchase what was called the largest elephant in captivity. This very large elephant arrived in Lancaster on a late night train in late February.<sup>47</sup>

A new show called Talbot's Fighting the Flames came to Lancaster to look for show equipment in February. Seeing what they liked and getting a deal they could live with from Hall, they left with twelve railcars, forty horses and a bandwagon.<sup>48</sup> Of particu-



Stationery used by the Horse King of the World in 1909. Pfening Archives.

lar interest is the mention of Talbot's man writing to "Scotty" and telling him what kind of team they wanted from Hall. This name Scotty comes up in several letters around 1906 but unfortunately, I have never found out enough about him to know who he was or how long he was around the Hall farm. The Talbot show was very short lived.

Not everyone was satisfied with their transactions. Jerry Mugivan, an owner of the Van Amburg show, was one. He wrote Hall at the end of February complaining about the horses he had just received.<sup>49</sup>

While Hall's horse and mule business along with the circus and circus animal business was steadily growing and prospering, another part of his life was growing as well. His family welcomed his only son, William Preston Hall Jr., on March 7, 1906. This was the third child born of Hall and his wife Sarah Elizabeth. The family had now grown to five members and remained that number.

The *Lancaster Excelsior* reported on March 2, 1906 that Hall had just purchased the largest elephant in the United States, later identified as Basil in *The Sun* out of New York.<sup>50</sup> Basil had been with the Cooper and Bailey Circus and then with the Adam Forepaugh Circus. He went to the Glen Island menagerie for a while before being owned by Dr. M. J. Potter, who sold Basil to Hall.

Billy was very good at hiring people who knew as much about horses as he did. He utilized his cousin Ben Hall, Henry Eichmire and Bert McClain the most, along with a couple other lesser known individuals. The first week of March found Ben Hall buying 100 head of horses in Kirksville, Iowa, paying almost \$12,000 to local farmers for them. Five railcars were required to move them to Lancaster.<sup>51</sup> In comparison, ten years earlier it was reported that Hall spent \$7000 to \$10,000 a week on horses. He now spent that

much in a day at one barn and sometimes had buyers at different barns on the same day. The next week McClain was in Weldon, Iowa buying horses.

*Billboard* covered the Hall's Huge Horse Show and Hippodrome in South Africa in the March 3, 1906 issue. The article was originally printed in the *Cape Argus*. The performance was held in the huge arena on Barrack Square. A wooden wall was built around the performance area to keep the dirt from flying and the floor was watered down to keep the flying dust to a bare minimum. One of the greatest features was the flying trapeze performance of the Denovas. They worked eighty feet in the air. No one in South Africa had seen such a routine before.

This was the program of the Hall's Huge Horse Show and Hippodrome.

Overture by Mr. L. J. Hall's Selected band.

Conductor – Mr. George Freeman, B.M.

IN HIPPODROME TRACK

The Grand Parade

The American Buffalo—or Bison—(one of the last of a well nigh extinct species, never before seen in South Africa.)

RING NO. 1

Clown's Entrée

RING NO. 2

Pim Pim and his educated donkeys

ON CENTRAL STAGE

Brothers Blanche – Musical Clowns

Clown Entrée – introducing "Scooping the Scoop"

Flat Race – 3 laps

CENTRAL STAGE

The Panama Troupe

RING NO. 1

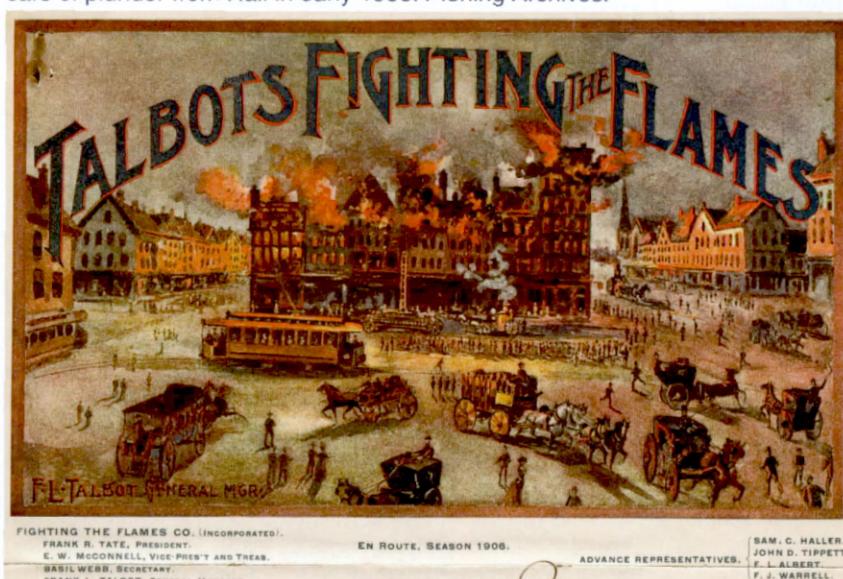
Azodi—The Human Lizard

ON TRAPEZE

Henry Ward

IN BOTH RINGS

The Talbot Fighting the Flames show bought twelve railroad cars of plunder from Hall in early 1906. Pfening Archives.



Mules and Hurdles—one of the funniest Equine items ever produced

Man vs. Horse—Event open to all comers.

ON CENTRAL STAGE

The Madrelina Troupe of Spanish Dancers

Flat race on Texan ponies

RING NO. 1

Dashing Equestrian Act over bars and hurdles by Miss Lizzie

Exhibition of Riding on Barebacked Horse by Miss Rose

The Great 40 Horse Act. Forty magnificent grays ridden and driven by one man.

Selection – Popular Melodies (10 minutes)

The Celebrated Denovas. The world's greatest aerialists, direct from their most successful tour through the United States.

Flat Race – Lady Jockeys – Open Event

Clown Entrée – "Fun in a Gymnasium" by Billy and Fred.

RING NO. 1

Graceful Four Horse Act by Mr. W.O. Foster

RING NO. 2

Feats of Horsemanship – by Willie Vonare

IN HIPPODROME TRACK

Pre-Historic Motor Car

The Calk Walking Horses – Campbell and Spee. A Splendid exhibition of elegant equestrianism.

Hall's Burlesque Band by the Clowns

Rough-Riding Exhibition by Ernest Ward

Exhibitions of Gaucho riding by Evencho.

Life out West—A realistic and exciting representation of holding up the stage coach on the prairie

Roman Standing Race – A most thrilling and exciting spectacle

Pony Race – Native Jockeys

The Great Roman Chariot Race – A Reminiscence of the Coliseum of Rome in ancient days.

GOD SAVE THE KING

One hundred and sixty head of mighty fine horses were shipped from Lancaster in March to Cincinnati for the Hagenbeck show. Al G. Barnes came to town and bought a good looking male lion. After returning to his winter quarters in Chester, Pennsylvania, he again contacted Hall in March about a small female lion. Ben Wallace purchased horses from Hall again in 1906 for his Great Wallace Shows. He sent a \$2500 check on March 31 and once again complained about one horse that was blind and that two others couldn't be used. In closing, he wrote that it was all right and they would make it up some other time. The Schiller brothers had reorganized their finances over the winter and expanded the show that Hall had recovered the previous fall by adding six railroad cars of show equipment from the Wm. P. Hall show.<sup>52</sup> The same week in April that Cook and Barrett opened in Lancaster, Hall shipped some horses to the Hale Fire Fighters Show in St. Louis at the St. Louis Exhibition.<sup>53</sup> The Smith Greater United Shows Carnival bought some of the equipment from the Wm. P. Hall's Show.<sup>54</sup>

While Hall's good fortune continued in the horse

and mule trade, the circus business had problems. Less than eight weeks after the Cook and Barrett Circus went on the road, it was finished again. The entire show was sold in Lancaster under a chattel mortgage on May 27. Colonel Hall was the winning bidder, offering of \$13,500. The July 14, 1906 *Billboard* is the first time I have seen the moniker "Colonel" used. The Cook and Barrett show was an early example of the buying, selling, and leasing of circuses, equipment and animals that made William Preston Hall a legendary figure in circus history.

July was a busy month. The Carl Hagenbeck Circus, Menagerie, and Trained Wild Animal Shows came to Hall on July 12 to get twenty horses, leased for six months at \$2000 per month.<sup>55</sup> He leased the Norris and Rowe show one advance car with the title Talbot's Fighting the Flames, one railroad coach, #11; and one stock car, #17. Talbot's Fighting the Flames show had been framed at the Hall farm in late February, and was already out of business. Hall had the Talbot show brought to his property. The contract with Norris and Rowe asked for a \$100 payment on August 17 and \$100 a month until \$1200 had been paid plus interest at six percent annum.<sup>56</sup> Ed Warner, the Norris and Rowe general agent, then wrote Hall, giving him instructions to ship the advertising car to the Woodstock, Illinois winter quarters via the Burlington and Northern Railroad. He had already made the transportation arrangements and knew the freight would be \$32.30 to get the car from Lancaster to West Chicago.

When the John Robinson Big 10 Shows visited close by in Centerville, Iowa in mid-June, Hall met with the Robinson management and sold them a large elephant, two leopards and a carload of horses.<sup>57</sup> It is safely assumed that Basil was the elephant sold to the John Robinson show as he is found on its roster later on.

Oscar Blickham of Quincy, Illinois and Joseph A Gunn of Mobile Alabama came to Lancaster to get into show business. They purchased some of the Cook and Barrett Circus. In the original contracts found in the Schuyler County Courthouse each bought one half interest in the following show equipment on July 17, 1906: five red cross cages #15, 16, 18, 10, and 9; one green cross cottage cage #9; one open den, #16; one canvas wagon, yellow #97; one pole wagon, yellow, #25; one cook house wagon, red, #37; one stake and chain wagon, yellow, #31; one plank wagon, yellow, #30; one stringer wagon, #24; one baggage wagon, one water wagon, red, #26; twenty head gray baggage horses and mares; six head gray ring horses and mares; one spotted ménage pony; one "January Act" mule with pony harness and cart; four flat cars, three 50 feet long, one 60 feet long; two sleeping cars, New Orleans #5 and Dan Patch #55; one advance car, #2 with all the paper therein; two stock cars; one red calliope; two sacred cattle; two male black bears; one llama; one male spotted hyena; one Russian wolf male; two black male leopards; ten sets harness; twenty-four lengths seats, 10 tiers high; six lengths of reserved seats, 7 tiers high; one big canvas top complete, 100 feet; six saddles; all lights. They titled their new show the Lentz and Robinson Show.

A follow-up contract was drawn between Hall and the Lentz and Robinson owners on July 26. Apparently Hall had thought twice about all his show paper being in the advance car and declared he was not interested in any manner in said show, either as proprietor, lesser, mortgagee, or in any other manner and didn't want his show paper, his pictures or likenesses of any of the performers on his show in 1905 to be used.

An account in the *Waterloo (Iowa) Daily Courier* on July 31, 1906 tells of the Hines Circus going broke near Hudson. It had bought part of the old Cook and Barrett Circus from Hall. When it could continue no longer, Hall foreclosed on the show and had it

returned to his farm.

The Norris and Rowe circus entered into a contract with Hall next on August 11, for ten horses in consideration of \$1250 due before December 31, 1906.<sup>58</sup> It should be noted here that Walter A. Higbee was the Notary Public on these contracts. I mention his name as he was a key player in the Schuyler County Bank that helped finance many of the Hall transactions and later became a judge who heard a couple of Hall's cases.

The horse and mule trade continued to be an important part of Billy's empire. McClain, Eichmere, Ben Hall and Hall himself were all reported out buying horses in 1906. McClain was found in Nebraska while everyone else was buying in Iowa and Missouri. The *Schuyler County Republican* told of 100 horses being shipped out September 7. Lou Hall returned from South Africa and by September 21 was on his way back with several car loads of horses and mules. Hall bought all the jennets at the Rippey's livery sale.<sup>59</sup>

Remembering how valuable the horse was to the America economy at this time, New York City utilized 1500 draft horses just for its fire department. There was still the police, city workers, carriage trade, and delivery wagons and many others also using horses.

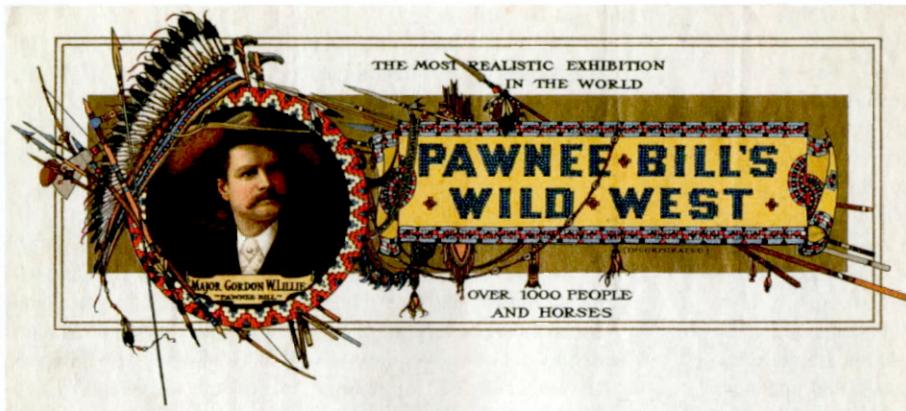
The Lemon Bros. Circus sought a buyer. Hall was actively seeking any circus with some merit to return a profit and Lemon Bros. fit the bill. While he went to Kansas City the first week of November to try to buy it, he returned to Lancaster empty handed when satisfactory terms could not be reached.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, the horses still were a sellable commodity and eighty-three were shipped out the week before Christmas. On December 27, the Norris and Rowe Circus came back to him to lease ten horses. They renewed the previous lease for the advance car labeled Talbot's Fighting the Flames, coach #11 and one stock car #17. The lease was for \$2801.20 payable over 12 months.<sup>61</sup>

## 1907

Hall, himself a noted horseman, was out buying horses from the farmers and people of the Bloomfield, Iowa area the second week of January. While there, he purchased 150 head. One point was made when a newspaper noted that John Gainey was in Lancaster buying horses from Hall. Gainey was from Bloomfield, Iowa. Was he out-bid by Hall the week before in Bloomfield and still needed horses? We can only speculate. Just two weeks later, Hall bought forty of the finest horses in Appanoose County for nearly \$275 each. The next week, he bought all he wanted in Kirksville, Iowa when he took home 175 head of horses, leaving behind nearly \$25,000.<sup>62</sup>

Louis Hall returned to Lancaster for a brief visit after having been overseas for almost six months. During this time he had been up and down the coasts of Africa, through India and the Island of Ceylon, to Palestine, then through Italy, France and back across the Atlantic Ocean. He had been on a quest to secure some elephants for his brother. While he didn't bring any back with him, he did lay the ground work for a lot of elephants to arrive at the Hall farm later on. This leads us to wonder exactly how the Hall Horse Repository in Cape Town operated. With Lou Hall returning stateside a few times each year and the average crossing taking nearly a month, did he have an assistant keeping the store open at all times or was it closed until he returned? Most orders that went back to South Africa were between fifty to 100 head of stock. That's a lot of animals for one person to care for and also operate a sales barn.

Charles Hartongue of Rochester, New York was in Lancaster to see Hall about some horses. When it was all over, Hartongue took two carloads of them back to New York. John Campbell, who ran the largest horse sales stable in St. Louis, was at the Hall barns the first week of March to buy horses. Early March found the Buf-



In 1907 Gordon Lillie, Pawnee Bill, offered to sell his Wild West show to Hall for \$35,000. While this deal didn't come off, Lillie and Hall did other business over the years. Pfening Archives.

falo Bill Show representatives back in town to buy more horses. At the Memphis, Missouri sales barns on March 7, Billy again bought all that he liked, bringing home 178 more horses. Accordingly, he left a wad of Farmer's Exchange Bank checks there, totaling over \$32,000. Before March 14 ended, Billy had fourteen cars of horses shipped out. On March 15 he and his helpers were in Corydon, Iowa where they went to work fast and furiously for over seven hours, buying up 320 head of horses and putting almost \$50,000 into the pockets of the local farmers and horse owners.

The *Schuyler County Republican* stated on March 15 that there wasn't a week going by that Hall wasn't shipping out twelve to eighteen cars of horses. One of the biggest problems for any animal business is the natural by-product of the livestock. While horses were out to pasture, their waste wasn't too big of a problem. The exotic trade, however, where animals were kept in cages and barns, had to be constantly cleaned up after. As the years went by and the more wild animals were housed at the farm, the mounds of waste slowly became huge. Local farmers were offered the opportunity to take as much fertilizer as they needed any time they wanted. Thus, many of the local farms were fertilized with exotic compost.

Hall was firmly in the outdoor entertainment industry because of his buying and selling animals, equipment and railroad cars. This lucrative business served him well for the next twenty years. The first elephant Mr. Hall owned was leased to the Cook and Barrett shows in 1905 and 1906. This female Asian elephant had been called Gyp. She was sold to the J. E. Henry Show in the spring of 1907.

When April arrived, the Campbell Bros. Circus out of Fairbury, Nebraska was in the market for more horses. Ed Campbell, one of the founding brothers, came to Lancaster to speak with Hall. Prior to his arrival, the Barnum & Bailey show had offered two female Asian elephants, named Alice and Lulu, for sale in the *Billboard*. McClain was sent to Bridgeport to secure them immediately. They were shipped to Lancaster and when they arrived, Ed Campbell was there negotiating for twenty horses. He agreed to take the two elephants as well and one contract was drawn up for both the horses and elephants. The elephants were never even unloaded in Lancaster and simply continued their journey on to Fairbury. Apparently Lulu's name was changed as the name Lulu is never found again.

The mule and horse trade in South Africa continued to be a steady source of income. Lou Hall had run the operation for several years now and returned to Lancaster on occasion. Upon his return in April, Louis and William went to the Schuyler County Court-

house to sign an agreement dated April 29, stating that William Hall was the owner of the 150 head of horses and the four Jacks and that Louis was taking to South Africa to be sold.

Willie Sells came to the Lancaster farm in July to buy some horses. In August, Pawnee Bill returned to buy some more horses. McClain went to sales barns for Hall, while Billy stayed at the farm continuing to care for his customers. The Barnum & Bailey show sold Hall two more elephants in August with the August 18, 1907 Bill of Lading in the Hall Papers.

Until Hall built a reservoir on his property, water for the farm had been supplied by water wagons pulled by teams of horses. It certainly didn't take much to realize that 1500 to 2000 head of livestock and the exotic animals drank plenty of water. In trying to improve his operation, Hall had a rather large windmill installed to help with the drafting of water in the well to serviceable use.

By September, Louis Hall had returned to Lancaster from Cape Town once again. He journeyed to Queenstown, Ireland before departing for the United States aboard the *S.S. Campania*, arriving in New York on August 31. He mentioned that he had many huge contracts but had not agreed to fulfill any of them just yet. He eventually returned to South Africa in late November, taking two car loads of horses and mules with him.

Hall wasn't exempt from the rumor mill. The press got the idea that he bought the Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated Shows. This was reported for several months with stories of him going to the Campbell winter quarters in Fairbury, Nebraska to look after his interests, in addition to visiting the show and sending animals to the show for its menagerie. While no documentation exists proving he became an owner, it is possible that the Campbells owed him enough money that he wanted to make sure he was going to be repaid.

Gordon Lillie, Pawnee Bill, had considered getting out of the business and offered his entire Wild West show to him for \$35,000. Lillie had bought many of the Great William P. Hall Shows animals in the spring of 1906 including the performing elephants. Hall responded saying the price was too high, but apparently offered an option of taking the show to South Africa. Pawnee Bill then sent him an inventory of the show that included twenty-three railroad cars, twenty-five parade wagons, sixteen baggage wagons, all canvas, trappings, harness, lights, seats, "everything complete just as it is in operation today." Lillie then added he would sell any part of the livestock as long as Hall took the show.<sup>63</sup> He even sent Hall invoices for equipment purchased for the show, including the bills for the lead bandwagon, now preserved at Circus World Museum; the Jap Wagon and some cars. In an October 9 letter, Pawnee Bill asked for the receipts to be returned after Hall was done considering the offer.

Pawnee Bill was at least thinking about the possibility of a South African tour as he replied that he would like to meet Louis Hall as he had many questions in his mind about such a venture. That was as far as the matter went, and train cars and animals were offered for sale in *Billboard* in December and the subsequent auctions the next April scattered the attraction among other show owners.

Louis James Hall fell in love with a young English woman who was a resident of London. She accepted his hand in marriage on December 19, and they made their home in Cape Town. Alethea

and Louis would be blessed with two fine children; a daughter, Lucy J., born in 1910; and a son, Louis J. in 1911.

### 1908

The last of the Great William P. Hall Show's cages were sold in early January to a party in Georgia while the bears went to the Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated Shows. The Hall farm prepared for the upcoming circus season as the Mayos were in the barns training a six horse liberty act and a mule for a hurdle act.

Frank R. Bigney was a columnist for the *Bulletin of Commerce* which wrote about people who made cities such as St. Louis great. He authored a column that was re-printed in the *Lancaster Excelsior* on January 19, 1908. It captured the aura of the Hall persona in brief sentences. "Nothing can shake his conviction when he thinks he is right," and "In conversation he is clear, direct, simple, effective, yet brief," were two of the many observations that came from the article.

Hall was a commanding presence anywhere he went. Around the Lancaster area, he was a common sight in the local barber shop. He received a great deal of personal attention during his brief stay when kids such as Harold H. Shepherd or "Shobie" shined his shoes, fixed his necktie with the three diamonds as large as hickory nuts, and brushed his hat. Hall always gave him a quarter for his efforts which was huge money to any boy in the early 1900s. The county assessor asked Billy the value of his diamonds, to which he replied, "I don't really know but I have a quart jar full of them." It was a great answer, even if not provable.

Not every transaction went smoothly. In February, after the Van Amburg show bought nine horses, the owners wrote him to complain about the price.

O. L. Smith, a former press agent on Hall's Circus, along with his family, returned to the Lancaster barns in March to buy horses for show he planned taking on the road.

Hall never really stood out as an advertiser. While he did run one ad in *Billboard* and the *New York Clipper* to sell his entire circus in January of 1906, nary an ad was seen otherwise. He did on occasions post a flyer saying he would be attending the horse sales in such and such a town on a certain date, but that was it. His reputation spread by word of mouth throughout the circus and horse business, so advertising would have been a waste of money. Every once in a while the newspapers added to the horse buying frenzy by stating he was billed to appear at Centerville today, Corydon on the 24th, Blakesburg and Kaboka on the 30th, Memphis on May 1 and May 8 at Bloomfield.<sup>64</sup>

While The Cook and Barrett Circus had failed in both 1905 and 1906 and some of the show equipment had been sold off, the Schillers reorganized with Hall's help and tried to go out again in 1908. In what was standard operating procedure, Billy had a chattel mortgage drawn up for the equipment that allowed him to repossess it for non-payment without legal process at any time during the course of the contract. On Monday May 14, he came to New Hampton, Iowa to re-possess the Cook and Barrett Circus. The show moved to Oelwein, Iowa the next day and set up. The Schiller brothers had him and his men arrested for being in their ticket wagon. They appeared before Judge E. L. Elliott with their case and the Schillers failed to appear, causing the Judge to dismiss all charges. The show was loaded and returned to Lancaster the next day.<sup>65</sup>

Louis Hall returned from Cape Town again in July. This trip had taken him from Cape Town to Southampton, England where he finally set sail for American soil. He arrived in New York aboard the *S. S. St. Paul* on June 28, 1908.

Hall bought a large home in town from Judge Shelton in 1908

that was the family home for over 60 years, and is now the Schuyler County Historical Museum. Marilyn Foreman, head of the museum, states that the wrap-around porch did not exist when Hall bought the house, but was added later. By August, the newspapers reported that Hall had a concrete sidewalk put in place.

Lancaster native James Hildebrandt worked on the farm and with the exotic animals when his left arm was broken by the kick of a mule in August. Being the way of the time, Dr. Duckworth set the arm and Hildebrandt was back in the barns a couple hours later.<sup>66</sup>

Hall was not afraid to legally go after those who harmed him or his business. Having visited county courthouse and spent many hours going through legal records, I found quite a few cases involving him heard in the Lancaster courts. One came in the November sessions of the circuit court when Hall brought suit against the Chi-



Hall was prospering in 1908 when he purchased this large house in Lancaster, which stayed in his family for years after his death. Today is it the Schuyler County Historical Society. Author's photo.

cago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad for negligence by delaying the shipment of horses just bought in Centerville that caused the horses to injure themselves after spending too much time loaded in a railroad car. He received \$1000 in damages.

The two local newspapers in Lancaster both continued to touch on the many horses bought and sold throughout November and December. One car of horses went to Philadelphia, and another group was shipped to Chicago. Lots of big, heavy draft horses were purchased. A feeler was even placed for a sale in Centerville, Iowa on January 15 of the next year when Hall would be specifically looking for horses four to ten years old and weighing from 1100 pounds and up.

The circus business was still garnering its fair share of the Hall family income. Mid-December found Billy contacting the Ringling Bros. Circus about animals and show equipment, particularly elephants. The Ringlings responded on December 16, saying the Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. elephants were leased to the Gollmars and that they would get back to him within the week.<sup>67</sup> The December 25 *Lancaster Excelsior* re-printed an article from the *Constitution Democrat* about Hall trying to help the Rhoda Royal show get framed and on the road early next spring. He was asked about having a circus again, to which he responded: "I want to avoid this unpleasant part and travel around without being held up for two or three days and the only way to avoid it is by steering clear of managing a show. I have done this for three years and have met with success, and it is my intention to continue working this plan." He never managed another circus.

## 1909

Hall was one to never slow down in his work. On January 1 he wrote the Ringlings again asking them to price the elephants. He also added a feeler for equipment for a twelve car show as he had a cash buyer on the string. C. A. Bunn was in town buying horses to return to Albany, New York with. Bert McClain and his wife returned from Ashland, Wisconsin where they had attended to the Hall horse business for the last three months. James Hildebrandt had the misfortune to get hurt out at the farm again. This time he wound up on crutches. By the middle of January two cars of horses headed to New York and another one to Ohio. Later in the same week, horses were shipped to Villisca, Iowa and to Ashbury Park, New Jersey. The third week of January found over 100 head of horses and mules bought in Centerville, Iowa, taken to Lancaster, and then two car loads of them sent to St. Louis and Belfast, Maine. Finally in the last week of January, over 60 head of horses came in from points around Iowa and several more car loads of horses went right back out.

Bert Andrews from Norway, Maine was in town buying horses in February. The newspapers reported over 100 head of horses had been shipped out the second week of February with McClain traveling to Queen City to buy horses. The third week of February saw Billy heading to Fairbury, Nebraska to look after his interests in the Campbell Bros. Circus. McClain had gone to Promise City to buy horses. Ernest Seamster from Downing, Missouri, brought up a single horse for Hall to look at, which Hall bought. Always in the market for more elephants, Hall was in contact with the Howe's Great London Shows. In a letter dated February 20, the show offered to trade two elephants for \$3000 worth of horses. Hall turned them down at the time but acquired them in 1913.

By March we see the circus business picking up again when Billy bought a cottage cage, two elephants, Tom and Queen; one flat car; one stock car; two coaches; an antebellum wagon, a lioness; two leopards; six sacred cows; a white deer; and one Aryx Antelope from the John Robinson Circus.<sup>68</sup> Hall, himself, traveled to Melrose, Iowa to buy horses. McClain was in Leon, Iowa looking to buy some horses. They

bought the horses alright. Over 250 head were purchased and delivered to Lancaster on Friday and Saturday, March 5 and 6. By Saturday, Hall had over twenty buyers at his farm looking things over. Sunday morning saw eleven car loads of horses shipped out of the farm.

Ben Wallace, who had made arrangements earlier in the year, came out to take possession of the forty gray draft horses he had ordered. Hall then

Hall remained active in the nuts and bolts of the horse business throughout his career. This ad in *The Union-Republican* of Corning, Iowa of April 7, 1909 uses Buffalo Bill's famous line, "I am Coming." Author's collection.

made arrangements with the Fred Buchanan-owned Yankee Robinson Circus to take the two new elephants, Tom and Queen, the white deer and two leopards. Two car loads of large mules were shipped to St. Louis to the Brick and Tile works.

As April turned the corner, horses steady departed the Lancaster farm. The Yankee Robinson show had representatives in town buying horses. Hall took off to Kansas City to see the week long opening of the Campbell Bros. Circus. The newspapers again reported he was looking after his interests in the show.

A car load of horses was shipped to Philadelphia again in May. While the horse trade was still very good, circuses presented all kinds of opportunities. The Pan-American Circus was up for sale and the offer became a viable answer to expand the circus trade as well. Hall entered into an agreement with J. E. Blenkiron and L. James as principals and the Empire State Surety Company of New York to sell the entire circus to him for \$17,000. A complete itemization of the circus was attached to the agreement, which is in the Schuyler County Courthouse. The show traveled by railroad and the inventory initially listed the coaches, but they were later scratched out. Included with the fifteen cars listed were two elephants, York and Jennie, ten lions, forty-eight baggage horses, all canvas, seats, side show banners, various other animals and show equipment, twenty-one wagons, a steam calliope, ten cages and eight other wheeled vehicles.<sup>69</sup>

He wasted little time in breaking up the Pan-American Circus when he sold four of the ten lions to a zoological park in Kansas City for \$2000. John A. Barton came to the farm on June 9 to frame a show, and leased privilege car #5 from the Pan-American Circus. Barton's show was called Cherokee Ed's Wild West Show. Hall authorized the repainting of the car as long as the #5 remained large and visible and that it be lettered as "Leased from W. P. Hall of Lancaster, Missouri" for the duration of the lease. He also confirmed that his show equipment would once again be in the huge July 4th celebration and parade.<sup>70</sup>

On the June 28, Walter Higbee, Hall's attorney, drafted a contract to lease a ten car show made up of the old Pan-American Circus equipment and animals for \$1000 a week by the Mackay's Wild West and Trained Animal Show out of Detroit. Henry Eichmere, one of Hall's trusted employees, went with the show to look after his financial interest at all times. Unfortunately, things didn't work out and the entire show returned to Lancaster on July 9th. Frank Harlan, another trusted employee, was sent out to Ottawa, Kansas to look after Hall's interests.

The rumor mills were at work again as to whether Hall would take out a circus. Billy added fuel to the fire when he told the Lancaster newspapers on July 23 that he was putting together the biggest show and menagerie to go on the road next year.

In what became a rather unusual scene at first but commonplace over the years, the Cherokee Ed's Wild West Show collapsed in Louisville, Kentucky and back in Lancaster by the middle of August. About twenty-five cast members and workers arrived with the equipment. They pitched a tent on the county fairgrounds and remained there until they found other work elsewhere. Hall received the complete show consisting of five railcars, a really nice show car (#5 in the lease) wagons, tents, seating, animals and parade wagons.

The Rice Bros. Circus owned by J. H. Garrett, sold Hall two elephants, Gyp, a female Asian, and Pollock, a male Asian in July when the Rice show was auctioned off. Hall ended up buying the entire show.

The animal tent at the Hall farm blew over in mid-August, tipping over cages. It was reported through town that several animals got loose, but no one was injured. Apparently there wasn't enough barn space if animals had to be housed in a tent. Three more lions were shipped the last week of August to Louisville, Kentucky. Hall's most trusted horse buyers, McClain and Eichmere, were in different towns buying horses at all times. The end of August Mc-

<b>WAIT FOR ME</b>	<b>I AM COMING</b>
<b>...THE...</b>	
<b>Horse and Mule King of the World</b>	
<b>W.M. P. HALL</b>	
<i>I will be at Sam Humbert's Barn in Corning, Iowa, on</i>	
<b>April 15 - THURSDAY - April 15</b>	
<i>Horses and Mares weighing 1,100 up, 5 to 10 yrs old. Don't forget the date. I will be there sure, personally.</i>	
<b>W.M. P. HALL</b>	

Clain was in Iowa and Eichmere in Illinois. On August 24 a large elephant arrived at the farm directly from Coney Island which was a stopping point as the elephant had just arrived from the jungles. While the article used the word "large" logic has it this was the young male Asian elephant later called Billy Sunday.

As September began, Hall visited Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth while it was playing Kirksville, Missouri. He sealed a deal with the management to supply all the horses that for the show in 1910. He also stayed to enjoy the performance as he always loved a good circus. Cars of horses continued to leave Lancaster for points around the country. The Yankee Robinson Circus sent a check for \$200 or four weeks rent on "Tony and the Pony." This is one of those references where you just shrug your shoulders wondering what it was.

A note in the local papers said that Hall traded circus equipment for land in Nebraska in early October. The idea of trading anything for land worked well for him as we'll see. While Mrs. Hall was raising a family, and being the socialite that she was, she also had health problems over the years. The Halls went to Columbia, Missouri for Mrs. Hall to have a surgical procedure that required good care and time to heal. Being the influential people they were all of this was noted in the *University Missourian* in Columbia on October 24. The same article gave a look into the horse and mule trade by indicating that Hall averaged buying and selling about 25,000 horses and mules per year.

A letter in the Hall Papers dated October 14 stated he bought the Great Cooper Bros. Shows. The circus's owners were glad to hear that it had arrived okay in Lancaster. Martin Downs, owner of the Cole Bros. Circus, came to Lancaster on November 16 to see if Hall would buy his show. Hall provided one of his big tents, seating and his men's labor to put a tent up in Kahoka, Missouri for the W. J. McDermott big stock sale on Wednesday, November 17th. After the Yankee Robinson elephants were returned to the farm in late November, things still hadn't slowed down. Billy and John C. Mills went to Buffalo, New York to look over the Cole Bros. Show the second week in December.

## 1910

The year started out with the horse business thriving again. It was estimated that there were 13.5 million horses in America by 1910. Over 3,000,000 of them were used in a non-farming capacities such as the local fire departments and the circus world.<sup>71</sup> Fifty-one of those horses left the Lancaster en route to Bridgeport, Connecticut early in January. The Barnum and Bailey Circus bought thirty-five gray baggage stock and sixteen saddle horses, paying Hall \$14,185.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the small shows didn't have storage facilities for horseflesh at their winter quarters. They definitely didn't want to spend the money to feed them if they could get around it. Horses needed to be broken to harness or teamed up and the winter months allowed the Hall employees to look over the horses from every angle. Hall and McClain were in Valiska, Iowa on Wednesday January 26 buying horses and in Corning, Iowa the next day buying more horses. One Hundred and fifteen horses were bought in Bloomfield on Friday. The purchases added up to five car loads that arrived in Lancaster on Saturday, then four cars shipped out on Sunday.

Horses were steadily being shipped out of Lancaster. On February 8 a car load went to Philadelphia and another car load to New York. All the newspaper clippings in February speak of two cars of horses being shipped out each week. By February 25, Hall was buying horses in Corydon, Iowa again. This time he got 115 fine ones for around \$25,000. A week later, he bought 120 in Memphis,

Missouri, paying over \$16,000.

The first week of March saw the Hall operation buying horses in Melrose and Moravia, Iowa where over 200 head of horses were bought. He also shipped out several car loads of horses the same week. Charlie Sparks, who ran the John H. Sparks Circus, bought fourteen head of horses for \$2850, payable in installments at 8% per annum with all rights to the horses going back to Hall if Sparks defaulted or just want to get rid of them.<sup>73</sup> On March 9 Sparks stated the horses had arrived and they were in good shape. On March 23, C.F. Rhodes of the Young Buffalo show wrote wanting to know where the seats were as they had not arrived yet. G. W. Bourn, a local farmer from Glenwood, Missouri, brought over a



Close up view of railroad car used as Hall's office. Photo taken after car was abandoned. Pfening Archives.

span of mules that Hall bought. The Yankee Robinson show leased one female Asian elephant named Queen. The show made \$100 payments each week as evidenced by letters in the Hall Papers. The young elephant that arrived last year called Billy after the Colonel's son was soon called Billy Sunday. He was sold to the A. M. Cauble wagon show in the springtime. Another male Asian elephant named Ollie arrived at the farm at some point in 1910 and was soon after sold to the John H. Sparks Circus. In the last week of March Hall bought fifty-four head of horses in Corning, Iowa where the top price paid was \$250.

The Young Buffalo show sent Hall two letters in April. The first, dated April 5, sent a \$165 payment for purchases already made and ordered some lead bars. The second, dated April 8, indicated the show bought sledge hammers, double trees, stakes, wagon poles, and wheel chocks. The United States Census was taken in April and Hall's occupation was listed as "Livestock." The April 22 *Lancaster Excelsior* reported that 140 horses had arrived from various points in Iowa. The same week, the *Kirksville Daily Express* mentioned that E. A. Trimmer had gone to the Hall farm and bought two big coach horses for \$560 for the Fire Department.

In trying to follow the careers of elephants in the circus industry over the years, little pieces of information are sometimes all that is discovered about these grand behemoths of American shows. While going through the Hall papers I found a letter from George W. Hall in which he asked about an old elephant that Billy had called Polly. She had a bad eye and was a good pusher. If they could come to terms, Popcorn George wanted to either lease or buy her. It is possible this letter referred to an elephant bought from the Rice Bros. in 1909 called Pollack.

An unknown owner out in Louisville, Kentucky put many animals up for sale in May of 1910. McClain took off to look things over and came home with a female Asian elephant named Mabel, and several other wild animals. Hall quickly made a deal with the Minneapolis Zoo to supply an elephant, six lions and tigers, a lla-

ma, one camel and three pea fowl for exhibition during the summer. Upon the arrival of the animals and the elephant Mabel from Louisville, all were disembarked at the switching tracks behind the depot where Hall parked his circus trains. From there, they had to walk just a few blocks to the other side of town to the Hall barns. All the animals were housed immediately with no trouble, except Mabel. She balked at going into the horse pasture and turned at a fast pace, heading back toward the other side of town. After several anxious minutes and many people surrounding her, another elephant was brought up to walk with her back to the barns. Here Hildebrandt tried to get her in the basement with Billy right beside her. She then dropped her head against the fence and started pushing over the posts at which point everyone scattered leaving Hall standing there hollering to get her taken care of. Her companion elephant stayed beside her long enough for Mabel to be hobbled then led against her better judgment to the basement where she immediately settled down and started eating.

Because of Mabel's

route throughout the

town and the publicity that followed, Samuel McCutcheon of Rock Springs, Virginia came to Lancaster to lease some animals for his park for the summer. He insisted on having Mabel and her two elephantine roommates, six lions, a puma, a leopard, monkeys, and other animals. They were all loaded a week later and transported to Virginia where they stayed for the summer with Hildebrandt in charge of them.

The Young Buffalo show had made a few deals with Hall in 1910 already. The show had a fire in the advance car the second week of May which prohibited the Schuyler County area from seeing the gaudy posters throughout the surrounding towns. The Young Buffalo train was described as being painted orange with olive green trimmings and lettered with pure gold leaf outlined in red. A newspaper tidbit from May 20 stated that it stopped in Lancaster just long enough to unload a calliope, some horses and other show stuff and re-load some other horses they had bought from Mr. Hall.

On May 14, an auction was held at the Hall farm of show surplus. McClain bought all the animal wagons and show equipment while Eichmere bought the two train cars. Who had this show before or what it was called is unknown to this author. The very next week the local papers commented that this was the first time in over a year that there were no circus wagons out along the street near the barns. Why did these two gentlemen buy the show property and not Hall? Where did all this auctioned equipment go? It all remains a mystery to me. As an indication of Hall's diversified interests, the Young Buffalo show sent a check to him near the end of May saying the buffalo had been received, was doing fine, and business had been good.

Charlie Sparks sent Hall a final payment of \$2020 for horses he had bought earlier in the year. The Norris and Rowe Circus collapsed and was foreclosed upon. The assigned trustees had the en-



View of Hall barns, date unknown, but probably from early 1930s. Author's collection.

tire show brought to Peru, Indiana where it was stored at the Ben Wallace winter quarters. An auction of the Norris and Rowe assets was scheduled in June. McClain and Hall both went to the auction but only bought two cars of horses. The *Billboard* coverage of this sale indicated that Hall bought ten ponies as a liberty act and twenty-two other horses, spending total of \$6105. He also received a dromedary from a show out in Nebraska at this time. The local farmers could always talk to him as he was a farmer and trader as well. John C. Mills of Kirksville, who had gone with Hall out to look at the Cole Bros. show in Buffalo the prior year, bought a lumber wagon, harness and a \$500 pair of horses from him in mid-June. Hall also visited shows as often as he could to try to get some business and to enjoy the show. He was able to sell the John Robinson Circus some more good horses when it played Centerville, Iowa around the middle of June.

While Hall was renowned for his wheeling and dealing, one of his bigger forays in the circus world happened in late June when he traded most of the Pan-American Circus equipment, except the animals, to a Mr. Smith in Omaha, Nebraska in exchange for 1280 western horses. These horses were all out on the range and needed to be corralled to evaluate them select the best ones. Tom Welsh went out for him to help round them up and make the selections.

The winning bidder at the auction of the Norris and Rowe Circus on June 11 didn't come up with the money. The sale was rescheduled. Ironically, the same thing happened at the second sale. On August 6, a third auction was held. McClain went to Peru and bought the two elephants, Hero and Duchess, five tableau wagons, one cage, twenty horses, harness and two camels, spending \$6,677 of Hall's money. The sale included four recently built tableau wagons built by the William Leonhardt Wagon Works in Baltimore for the 1910 season of the Norris and Rowe Circus (This is covered in the *Bandwagon*, March-April 1972.). The wagons all remained at the Hall farm through 1912. Later in the afternoon of August 6, the train cars were sold off with McClain buying eight cars. It is unknown what type they were.

Lou Hall was home from Africa for a short stay before leaving for Cape Town on August 16 with 120 mules for the Cecil Rhodes Diamond Mines. The farm obviously wasn't large enough for all the show equipment and animals that were passing through there. In August a large barn was expanded just in time for the wet weather of winter to set in. Tom, a male Asian elephant bought from the John Robinson show the previous year, was sold to the A. M. Cauble wagon show.

When the Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated Shows bought a nice coach for its train when the show played in Lancaster on August 30, 1910. Jim Hildebrandt returned to Lancaster the second week of September after having been at the Rock Springs, Virginia park with Hall's animal all summer. *Billboard* reported on September 10 that Hall sold the large male elephant Hero to the Lucky Bill Show. The *Lancaster Excelsior* stated on September 16 that he had shipped some of his elephants to the Moos Bros. Circus in Joliet, Illinois. Jim Hildebrandt had gone with them. Willie Eichmere went to the west coast with a shipment of mules in September.

With that many animals, an escape was going to happen sooner or later. Sure enough, one lioness got loose in the basement where the big cats were on one side of the basement and the elephants on the other. She caused quite a ruckus but was finally recaptured and all the animals settled down. In October, Queen and Jenny broke loose and had a good time tossing things for a while. Queen then got loose again two nights later, without her partner this time. The Coulter and Coulter shows came to Lancaster to winter at the Hall farm. While no paperwork has been discovered about the winter

quarters arrangement between different shows and Hall, there was obviously a bill involved. It certainly cost a lot to feed the menagerie animals and horses in pasture let alone the rental fee for storage of train cars and wagons. It is quite possible that Hall acquired some ownership of show properties in this manner. Circuses might also have gone on the road in the spring owing him for the winter stay, although this is speculation on my part.

More mules were headed toward Cape Town again on November 15 when Lou Hall returned to Lancaster to gather up 331 mules to go as one huge shipment. Eichmere accompanied the shipment to New York along with Lou who returned to Cape Town. In December, Billy was interviewed in the lobby of the Chamberlain Hotel in Des Moines, Iowa where he told of having a contract for over 1000 mules destined for the Cecil Rhodes's diamond mines. Several hundred more mules headed to South Africa for use by the British government.<sup>74</sup> Wade H. Coulter came to the farm to discuss the circus business. He and Hall traveled to Chicago to look over the possibilities for winter dates. Coulter wanted to convert his wagon show to a railroad operation, and ended up buying all his train cars from Hall.<sup>75</sup>

### 1911

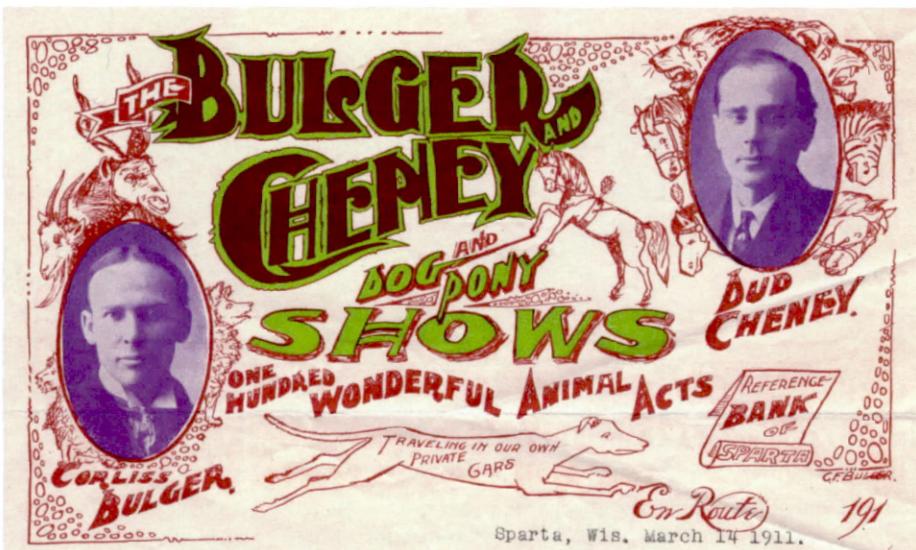
The horse business was a very lucrative part of the Hall operations again in 1911. M. C. Cookston of the Young Buffalo Wild West Show wrote to him on January 2 to say that the horses had arrived safely. Charlie Sparks came to Hall in late February and sold back fourteen horses, all branded under the chin with an "H" for the Hall farm, for \$2850. He had gotten them from Hall in 1910. All of the horses were five years or younger and had been used on the John H. Sparks Circus. Also included in the sale were seven sets of double work harness with wooden hames.

Elephants became a bigger fascination to Hall as the years went by. He already had twelve elephants in his stable when two more were bought and consigned from Verona, Pennsylvania for delivery to the farm. These were Babe and Monte and were bought from the Howe's Great London Shows.

Hall left Lancaster in late February to pursue the possibilities of buying another complete circus in Tennessee, supposedly a 20 car show. The August 26 *Billboard* confirmed that Hall had bought a 19 car show but gave no mention which show it was. The first week of March was a beehive of activity as show owners were steadily dropping in to look over and deal with Hall for show properties. The local newspapers indicated a great number of circus wagons had shipped out while the Coulter show prepared to open the 1911 season after residing at the farm all winter.

Lou Hall had returned again from South Africa for a short visit and to obtain more horses and mules for the African diamond mines. McClain bought 107 head of horses in Melrose, Iowa while Eichmere attended sales in Hurdland and Canton. Billy himself bought 160 head of horses in Centerville, Iowa and had them all shipped to his farm in one special train. The next day he loaded 150 horses up to ship out to eastern markets. McClain was also buying horses in Lovilia, Iowa where he picked up twenty-five more.

Hall was in the business of selling anything. A letter in the Hall Papers indicates that the Dan Robinson Show needed mattresses



The Bulger and Cheney Dog and Pony Shows shopped at Hall's barn in the spring of 1911. The show lasted until September. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

for its sleepers. After the sale, Danny Robinson complained that they should have been shipped Freight instead of Express to save money.

One of Hall's crustaceous customers over the years was a rough and tumble show owner named Tom Weidemann. In early 1911, Weidemann approached him in the hopes of getting some equipment at a reasonable rate. The *Billboard* reported he bought flatcars, wagons and some elephants. In March, Weidemann wrote to say the wagons had arrived and that the elephants and horses didn't need to be shipped until April.

As April began, Bert Bowers's brother Dan Bowers bought a private rail coach from Hall and was making payments on it but really wanted to sell it. The Dan Robinson Show sent Hall a camel. The *Billboard* mentioned that Fred Buchanan had been in Lancaster buying horses for his Yankee Robinson Circus the first of April.

A new circus was put together in Necedah, Wisconsin by Corliss Bulger and Bud Cheney of Sparta, Wisconsin. Known as the Bulger and Cheney Dog and Pony Shows, it contacted Hall about railroad cars, wagons and animals in February before going to Lancaster in early March. The *Billboard* reported it bought four carloads of parade equipment.<sup>76</sup>

Letters found in the Hall Papers tell a different story. The Bulger and Cheney Circus bought a flat car, a baggage car and a coach. After sending a check for the balance of the deal, they asked that the bandwagon, cages, baggage wagon, water wagon and January wagon be loaded on the flatcar and shipped to them immediately. They asked for the sleeper and baggage cars to be held for a while.<sup>77</sup> They ended up going out on eight railcars by renting some other cars. They folded on July 6, due in part to an awful drought that had devastated their business throughout Minnesota and both Dakotas. While they were able to close for a couple weeks and re-organize, the show closed for good on September 11.<sup>78</sup>

When the show went broke, Bulger and Cheney were done with the circus business. They placed ads in *Billboard* offering the show for sale. The Barrett and Zimmerman Midway Horse Market in St. Paul bought the show. Whether Bulger and Cheney owed the Barrett and Zimmerman company money or whether Barrett and Zimmerman was trying to make a quick buck is unknown. The Barrett and Zimmerman for sale ad in the *Billboard* on January 20, 1912,



The Young Buffalo Wild West bought horses from Hall for the 1911 tour, and leased elephants the next year. Pfening Archives.

however, only offers one 70' coach, one 50' coach and one 60' flatcar to go with the show equipment. There is no mention of draft stock or stockcars. The ad concluded with tools and such for a first class eight car show. A later ad said the other cars were leased. Whether Barrett and Zimmerman took what they wanted and sold the rest or not, J. H. Garrett ended up with most of it to start up the Rice Bros. Circus in 1912.<sup>79</sup>

Bert McClain went to Baraboo to talk with the Ringling brothers about buying some elephants. He came away with four. Lena and Lou had both been on the Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Show and were shipped directly from that show to Lancaster. Baby Boo and Boston were both from the Ringling show but didn't troupe, staying in the Baraboo winter quarters. Hall telegraphed the Ringlings asking if the elephants needed martingales on them. In a letter in the Milner Library circus collection at Illinois State University, the Ringlings replied that these two (Boston and Boo) had not been worked the previous fall and were be a little fresh for even the very most experienced of handlers. They said they used a French hobble that had a chain going through a ring to each front foot. The ring was then attached to a stake on the picket line or to a 30 foot chain for unloading to stop them from running.

Dan Robinson was another fledgling circus owner. He came to Hall from his Nashville winter quarters, purchased some horses and wanted to talk about some elephants. His Robinson's Famous Shows was about to go on the road and wanted a couple elephants later on. In a letter dated March 31, 1911, Robinson told Hall the horses had arrived in fine shape. They talked about trading because the letter mentions that if Hall wanted the leopard and camel to go directly to Buchanan, and just credit Dan Robinson \$500 on a future purchase.

The elephant business was definitely picking up. The Kit Carson Buffalo Ranch Wild West show took Monte, Babe and one other elephant with Hildebrandt going with them. Jennie or Mabel as she was sometimes called was sold to the Howe's Great London Shows. Amongst all the deals, sales, and leases for show animals and equipment, Hall continued to get out to the sales barns and kept buying horses. He personally bought 127 head of horses in Seymour, Iowa and had them shipped back to Lancaster.

Monte proved to be a pile of trou-

ble on the Kit Carson Buffalo Ranch Wild West Show. While Hildebrandt was adjusting the chain between the collars of both elephants, Monte, being the smaller of the two, grabbed Hildebrandt with his trunk and threw him down, eventually killing him. The Kit Carson show wired Hall immediately. He told them to get rid of the elephant, have Hildebrandt's body embalmed and returned to Lancaster with Hall paying all expenses.<sup>80</sup> The show had Monte destroyed and complained about Babe having a bad leg and being useless.<sup>81</sup> Hall was visibly shaken when he along with Henry Eichmere attended Hildebrandt's funeral. He had been a faithful employee for the last nine years and had worked his way up to head elephant man. James Hildebrandt, born June 10, 1867, died April 28, 1911. He left behind his wife Mary and a daughter.

Hall bought 160 head of horses in the second week of May and then shipped out seven car loads of horses on Sunday to parts unknown. He bought fifty more horses in Bloomfield, Iowa that Friday. By May 26, he was buying horses in Corydon, Iowa. The newspaper mentioned that this was the last sale of the season. The newspapers also stated that one of his large elephants was shipped to a show in Kansas. Hall and his family took the night off to go watch the Coulter show in Kahoka, Missouri near the end of May. The Coulter-owned Cole Bros. Circus opened in Lancaster just four weeks before that.

While Thomas Weidemann headed the Kit Carson Buffalo Ranch Wild West show, he leased elephants and bought horses from Hall. Weidemann sent Hall a letter dated May 8, 1911 saying the show would keep the elephants for \$50 a week with Hall supplying the handler. The letterhead said "Wiedemann Bros. present the greatest of all melodramas 'Custer's Last Charge.'" Another letter was sent to Hall with a check for \$545 on May 15, 1911. The letterhead used, however, was for Wiedemann's Big American Show, Cosmopolitan Rough Riders and Indian Congress. Three performing elephants and a car load of Shetland ponies were sent in late May to join the Famous Robinson Circus in Carthage, Illinois.

Lou Hall returned to the states in June, once again from Cape Town, to find another load of mules to take back. The Yankee Robinson show had an elephant escape and run right off the edge of a cliff into Beaver Dam Lake in Cumberland, Wisconsin, thereby inflicting life ending injuries to it. The press said the elephant was called Queen. Hall had several elephants leased to the Yankee Robinson show but none were called Queen. The elephant was in fact

The Ringling brothers were more a vendor than a customer for Hall. Around the time the Ringlings used this stationary in 1911, Hall actively sought surplus animals from them, mainly elephants. Pfening Archives.



Tom Tom, an Asian male who had been on Yankee Robinson since 1904.

Al Campbell of the Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated Shows was a guest of the Halls the first week of July. Lou Hall and McClain had been buying all the mules that were worth having. By mid-July, Hall was ready to ship over a 100 Missouri mules to Africa with Lou Hall accompanying the load. Thomas Wiedemann complained that one of the elephants he was leasing called Babe was not good and he hadn't been able to use her at all. What did Billy want them to do with her?

The Lancaster YMCA wanted to have a Wild West show in August. The officials turned to Billy for help and he offered all he



In 1911 Tom Wiedemann leased elephants and bought horses from Hall. Pfening Archives.

could. He provided the tent, seating, lighting and whatever else was needed along with men to help set it all up and then take it down. The three elephants leased to the Dan Robinson Famous Shows were returned home in the middle of August. A week later, George W. Little and his wife along with Dan Robinson came to Lancaster to talk about the possibility of Hall buying the Dan Robinson Famous Shows.

After the Kit Carson Buffalo Ranch Wild West show lost the male elephant and complained about the second elephant being useless, it made a deal to get a couple replacements. The show responded to Hall on September 23, saying the elephants had arrived. They returned Babe on September 20, and deadheaded a flatcar back with her. Oddly, I have never found any mention of her after returning to the farm.

The Fiss, Doerr and Carroll Horse Company had apparently decided that Hall was on to a good thing with all this circus stuff when they sent their representative F. F. Peterson to Morganfield, Kentucky on September 28th for an assignee's sale of the Dan Robinson Famous Shows. Judge Walter Evans of the United States Courts sold the show to the highest bidder. They bought the entire show for \$28,000 being the only bidder. It wasn't long before they decided to sell it at an auction. The auction was held on Friday November 24 in Indianapolis. The Fiss, Doerr and Carroll Horse Company advertised the upcoming auction in *Billboard* for the entire show world to see. The advertising did its job as the entire show was sold piecemeal for \$39,000 for a fast \$11,000 profit for the company.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps it was a great lesson learned as well, because the Fiss, Doerr and Carroll never owned a circus again.

The newspapers heard about Hall looking into enlarging his rail yards in August. They reported he would be able to hold fifty cars after the expansion, in spite of being able to already hold that many cars. In the September 22nd edition it was correctly reported that the train tracks were being enlarged to hold 100 rail cars. Strangely, by the 1930's when several photos were taken of the Robbins Bros. Circus train cars and some of the Buck Jones Wild West cars, there

is only two side tracks in existence. So, either these tracks were indeed built and then removed later on, or they never were laid down. With the two spur tracks in existence since 1905, they might have been improved or even lengthened but no additional tracks were laid. McClain was again in parts of Iowa buying horses. The W. H. Coulter Famous Railroad Shows and Indian Pete's Wild West arrived in Lancaster for the final date of the season on September 9th. After completing the performances, the show was moved to the farm and rail sidings for the winter.

One of the first and finest customers that Hall had was the Meng Horse Bazaar in Philadelphia. This relationship started in the early 1880's. In September, George Meng came to Lancaster to see Hall.

Lou Hall was home from South Africa at the time and went to Chicago to greet Meng, a cordial thing to do. Unfortunately, Lou was mugged by an unknown assailant. Billy went to Chicago immediately to secure the safety of his customer and friend and to check on his brother.

Hall loved exotic animals. He bought what the newspapers described as a car load of lions, tigers, and leopards in St. Paul the first of October, all of which were delivered to his farm in mid-October. Unfortunately for a few, one of his elephants got loose at night and wandered around. It's unfortunate because it happened several times as the elephant was apparently an escape artist. The Ringling show sold him a zebra during the 1911 season; they tried to buy it back the next year.

Fred Buchanan, owner of the Yankee Robinson Circus, came to town in November to transact some business. Hall also was talking to the Ringling Brothers as the Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Circus was not going out next year, which made available an entire show of surplus animals, wagons, equipment and rail cars. Hall was a shrewd dealer. He offered a variety of tracts of land to the Ringlings in a trade for the entire Forepaugh-Sells Circus. The Ringlings respectfully declined the offer, saying they could not use the land. They would try to make a very good offer to Hall, otherwise they would list it all as surplus.

A concern stemming from Hall's booming business in the United States was that a shipment of horses and mules promised to brother Louis in South Africa did not ship. Louis wrote him on November 29, displaying his devastation in not receiving the load. He had already heavily advertised the animals and now he had nothing to offer for sale. Louis went on to say that he had the St. Louis crowd bringing in fifty mules in competition to him. He said having no mules to sell would soon kill him. Billy took about three weeks to get a load together and another shipment of mules to Cape Town left Lancaster on December 19, 1911.

Not every transaction that Hall completed was for a large amount. Having had a baby lion born, the E. G. Smith's Colossal Shows put down a \$10 deposit on the baby and asked Hall to let them know in four of five weeks when the little fellow was starting to nibble on some meat. Lucky Bill Newton sent Hall a check for \$400 that he had owed him on December 20th. Newton asked for the receipt to be sent to Lumberton, Mississippi. He also asked if W. H. Coulter had made a success out of his railroad show. Lucky Bill was considering the railroads and traveling south and appreciated the favor.<sup>83</sup>

## 1912

Not as much documentation has survived for 1912 as in previous years. Vern Seaver, who was running the Young Buffalo Wild West, Col. Cummins Far East and V. C. Seaver's Hippodrome show, had been trying to get some elephants for his show. On February 12, he

wrote Hall, telling him to send a contract for the elephants. York, a tuskless male Asian, was sold to the Toledo Zoo where his name was changed to Babe. Lou was leased to the Kit Carson Wild West Show. Queen was leased to the Yankee Robinson Show.

The previous year's title of W. H. Coulter Famous Railroad Shows and Indian Pete's Wild West show was now going out of the Hall winter quarters as the Cole Bros. World Toured Shows with W. H. Coulter as one owner and a new partner named Al Campbell. Al was already one of the owner's of the Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated Shows. The show placed an order with Hall for sixty dapple grays.<sup>84</sup>

M. H. Ahrens of Hamburg, Germany, who was in the horse and mule business, wrote Hall on March 16, 1912. His business was good enough that he could not get away right now but needed more good horses and mules. Andreas was going to Spain to buy some good export mules. He went on to ask if Billy was going to send any horses or mules to send the best as the rates were still the same. "Please make sure the mules are big and extra good," he implored. They needed to be at least ten hands high. The horses needed to be over three years old and sixteen hands high, in pairs if possible and not to send any Shires or Clydesdales.<sup>85</sup>

Rhoda Royal had been an excellent horse trainer for years and now was taking on the teaching practices of an elephant trainer. He leased a young male Asian elephant named Muggins from Billy in the spring of 1912.

Royal's May 11 letter to Hall said that a baby elephant had been born on the show sixteen days earlier. Since the letter was written on Rhoda Royal Circus stationary, the mention of a baby elephant initially caused confusion since no record exists of an elephant birth on any of Royal's circuses. The mystery was solved, however, by the realization that Royal's missive was written from Woodland, California, where the Sells-Floto Circus was exhibiting that day. Royal was a performer on the show, and used an old letterhead from his own show.

He was referring to Baby Hutch, born on the show April 25. In mid-May, Vernon Seaver of the Young Buffalo Wild West, Col. Cummins Far East and V.C. Seaver's Hippodrome wrote to complain that Hall's elephant men were drunks and that the elephants did nothing.

Al Campbell was in town for two days in August discussing business with Hall. He reported the Cole show did good business in Nebraska, and would head toward Texas before returning to the Hall farm for the winter. The Downie and Wheeler's World's Best Shows Combined had been paying for horses from Hall earlier in the season. In a letter dated August 21, the show said it might be in the market for an elephant or two the next year but didn't care to make any further additions in 1912.

After the foreclosure of the Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated



Hall bought, sold and leased elephants for almost thirty years. Author's collection.

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After the foreclosure of the Campbell Bros. Great Consolidated

Shows by the bank in Fairbury, Nebraska, Hall's three leased elephants, Alice, Annie, and Lizzie, returned to Lancaster. Hall purchased Alice from the Barnum & Bailey show in 1907 and sold her shortly thereafter to the Campbell show. Lizzie had been on the Great William P. Hall Show in 1905. She was sold to Pawnee Bill in 1906 and then went to the Campbell Bros. in 1908.

Ben Wallace bought some horses from Hall late in the fall. He wrote on October 24 saying that he had received the horses, but that four or five are ill. Even though he had not been able to use them, Wallace thought they would get along nicely through the winter



Rhoda Royal leased the elephant Muggins from Hall for his acts on Sells-Floto in 1912. Royal wrote Hall on this stationary from his earlier indoor show. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

and be in good shape the next spring. Wallace was looking to trade twenty light grey horses weighing between 1400 and 1600 pounds each for about fifteen black horses weighing about 1500 pounds each. Those horses would need to be low to the ground, he stated.<sup>86</sup> Hall had a large crew of men working at the farm to enlarge the barns to accommodate the many wild animals that called Lancaster home over the winter.

Lou Hall had returned from South Africa in November for a brief visit. He then gathered a load of mules and headed back to Cape Town. The Cole Bros. show arrived in mid-November to winter at the farm.

A full column interview with Hall appeared in the *Moberly Weekly Monitor* in Moberly, Iowa on December 13, 1912. He was quoted as saying that he had four rules in life that he lived every day by. He always went to bed early, preferably by eight o'clock every evening and arose the next morning by 6:00 a. m. He never drank and he never smoked. He was well known in the horse market having sold over 28,000 horses the previous year in addition to a half a dozen tigers, a dozen lions, a few elephants and several leopards.

### 1913

The first day of January found Tom Weidemann writing Hall complaining about the harness he had just received. It was light and not the good work harness he thought he was buying. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus leased some elephants from Hall early in 1913 and sent along a payment on January 11. The Young Buffalo show replied to the previous conversations on January 12, telling Hall to go ahead with the contract for the elephants, horse and trainer, plus the sacred oxen. A few days later, an agreement was reached with showmen in Chicago who were putting on a hippodrome show. The Great Northern Hippodrome or the "Hip" was the location of this

great event. The ponies and elephants were shipped directly to Chicago for the engagement.

Antwerp, Belgium became another part of the world in which Hall did business when he shipped a carload of horses there the first week of February. He immediately shipped another car load of horses to Antwerp the next week. Major C. F. Rhodes, who owned and operated the Oklahoma Bill Wild West, put two units on the road in 1913. He came to the farm in February and selected an entire car load of good quality arena horses which were immediately shipped to the winter quarters of the Oklahoma Bill Shows.

George Arlington, father of Ed Arlington who was associated with the Miller Bros. Wild West show, came to Lancaster in the middle of February to look at some parade wagons for the Wild West show. He bought the three tableaus that Hall had purchased at the Norris and Rowe auction in 1910.<sup>87</sup> There is no evidence that these wagons were used by any other show before the Ranch, and that they had just been sitting in Lancaster since Hall bought them. They were simply referred to as the blue, green and white tableaus at the Norris and Rowe sale. The tableaus were handcrafted with heavily carved designs and were definitely works of art. Ironically, Hall would own at least one of these again in 1920 when he bought the Yankee Robinson Circus. He then sold it to Mugivan and Bowers for their Howe's Great London Shows.<sup>88</sup>

The circus business and elephants in particular continued to do booming business as well as the horse trade. Rubber was leased to the Howe's Great London Shows while Duchess was sold to Fred Buchanan's Yankee Robinson Circus. A letter from Carl Hagenbeck's American agent, S. A. Stephan, on April 9 indicated two elephants had arrived in New York from Germany and the total cost was \$2800. The *Lancaster Excelsior* then announced the arrival of the baby elephants, named Mutt and Dutch, on Tuesday April 15. Both of them went to the Yankee Robinson show. The newspapers stated that Art Eldridge was in Texas looking after a sick elephant. J. H. Boyer came to the farm and hand selected some horses and harness. On March 21 when he wrote Hall, he said the horses arrived and all was ok, but the harness hadn't arrived and asked Hall to get it to him.

Bert McClain, a faithful employee for many years, started to build a new five room cottage on a couple of parcels of land he owned just north of the Town Square in April. The rewards of his long hours and many travels were starting to benefit him and his

Cage used by The Great Wm. P. Hall's Shows. This photo was part of a set taken about 1913 to advertise wagons Hall had for sale. Only three of the images are known to have survived. Pfening Archives.



wife. Billy made a point of being in the sales barns on Thursdays when he had a card printed with all the locations and dates of sales he planned to attend in February and March.

Ira Ryun had taken a load of mules across the Atlantic to Germany in mid-April. He continued his travels to India where he awaited the arrival of new elephants to take back to the United States. His journey was not the largest procurement of animals as only one calf arrived at the Hall farm on July 5. This baby elephant was reported to be the youngest elephant ever at the Hall farm.

While the local newspapers did a great job of reporting the circus and horse news, there were some very vague references such as on April 25 when it was reported that Hall sold six of his circus cars to a company in St. Joseph, Missouri the previous week. Having no other evidence of this transaction, we can only wonder who bought them. Devastating floods in Peru, Indiana caused the deaths of several Hagenbeck-Wallace elephants including Baby, Bedalia, Nancy, Trilby, Zeffa and Josky, all Asian females; Jumb and Kongo, both African females; and Satan, an Asian male. The show contacted Hall about getting some replacement elephants. He sold them an Asian male named Louis.

Sig Sautelle and his partners purchased twelve car loads of show equipment from Hall. A deal was also reached whereby Alice, Annie and Lizzie, former Campbell Bros. Circus elephants, were leased to Sig Sautelle. On May 2, Hall attended sales at Memphis, Missouri on April 25 where he purchased eighty-six good horses and left over \$12,000 in the hands of local farmers and horse breeders. In early June, Joe Miller of the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West wrote Hall to compliment him on the fine horses they had received.<sup>89</sup>

The Barnum and Bailey Circus needed more horses during the summer. Fortunately, the show's ledgers and cash books from 1908 to 1918 survive at the Milner Library. From them we learn that Hall was paid \$3450 for those horses on July 22, 1913.

The Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's Far East Show went bankrupt in Denver. An auction of the show was scheduled. The August 13, 1913 *Billboard* reported that Hall took off immediately for Denver to get back his four elephants that had been leased to the show.

The new baby elephant that arrived from Ceylon on July 5 was sold to the Monroe Bros. and Buffalo Tom's Wild West show about two weeks later.<sup>90</sup> The Barnum and Bailey Circus bought twenty horses from Hall in late July. A huge Osteopathic Convention was held in Kirksville, Missouri in August. Hall gladly provided a big tent, 160 feet wide, seating 5,000 people. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus sent him a contract dated August 21 to lease three gentle elephants for \$50 per week for the rest of the season. A letter from Charles Cory on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in November informed Hall that he wouldn't recognize his elephant Juno "as she is almost fat." Juno had been one of the re-possessed elephants from the Buffalo Bill-Pawnee Bill show.

In the middle of the summer, Hall bought a barn from the local Christian Church. He had it taken down and relocated to his lots north of town where it was rebuilt. This certainly increased storage space. It was referred to as the Stretch barn. This was the very same barn that Billy had learned all about the horse trade and steadily returned to as a buyer every Saturday when it was called the Stretch Livery Stables.<sup>91</sup> The Allman Bros. Big American Shows was a railroad carnival that could be contacted through C.W. Parker in Leavenworth, Kansas. It leased some railroad cars from Hall as documented in a letter dated August 1, 1913 from Glendine, Montana.

Veteran showman Frank A. Robbins bought some animals and



Hall stands behind some of his elephants at his residence about 1914. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

horses from Hall earlier in the year and had been making the usual monthly payments. As winter was approaching, Robbins asked Hall if he wanted the horses as he, Robbins, always sold them through the auction house of Fiss, Doerr and Carroll in New York. Hall pushed him toward a reputable dealer in Philadelphia that we can only presume was the Meng Horse Livery. The number of shows that sold off their horses in the winter can be questioned, but it is clear that many shows, smaller ones in particular, needed the cash to get them through the winter. This also alleviated having to feed or stable their livestock. Hall made a common practice of buying back horses at the end of a season for about half of what he sold them for. He fattened them up over the winter, and then got a premium price for them the next spring.

As the circus season started to wind down, the Hall quarters became a beehive of activity again. Fred Hatfield, Lee Greer and Al Campbell, former owners of the Campbell Bros. Circus that closed the previous year, joined forces again and bought the show back. They sold half of it to the Rice Bros. Circus in Minnesota and took a fourteen car show on the road in 1913. They renamed it Cole Bros. Circus. While they made the complete season, they had little to show for it, and sold the entire show back to Hall. The show arrived in Lancaster from the west coast in the middle of October.

With so many elephants and horses on the property, Hall steadily bought hay from local farmers. The local newspapers reported he spent over \$20,000 just for hay. Hall talked to Jerry Mugivan of the Howe's Great London Shows about two elephants they might wish to sell. Mugivan had an old gal named Rubber that only had one good eye. He figured she wasn't worth more than a \$1000. Fanchon, the other elephant, was worth about \$2000. Hall bought Rubber. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus came to him in November to buy another elephant. This time they got the young Asian male Billy Sunday.

Toward the end of November, the Yankee Robinson show closed the season in Arkansas. While en route to its Des Moines, Iowa winter quarters the train was switched to the side in Glenwood Junction where the entire twenty-two car show was sold to Hall. It was then re-routed to Lancaster and unloaded. Over the weekend of November 15 and 16, Hall had 300 members of the general public stop by to see his huge menagerie. The streets were lined with circus wagons everywhere.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus sent another contact to him for

the 1914 performing season requesting a troupe of five performing elephants. The circus paid \$125 a week for them and a man to work them. Art Eldridge set out with five performing elephants along with several ponies for a series of winter dates in a Toronto hippodrome.

Once the sale of the Yankee Robinson show was completed and it was all in the Hall quarters, Fred Buchanan and Billy hammered out a contract where Buchanan leased back a 12 car show out of the Yankee Robinson equipment. Queen and Jennie, two female Asian elephants, were sold to Al Wheeler during the winter. Emery broke them in during the winter and started to fatten them up so by March of 1914, Wheeler wrote that Queen had already gained about 200 pounds. Carl Hagenbeck then wrote

Hall in the middle of December offering two female elephants about 51" to 55" in height for \$5800. Hall countered by proposing to trade them for mules, which Hagenbeck declined, saying they were too high priced. Closing out the year, Charlie Sparks wrote on December 30 to confirm that he had bought the male elephant Mutt, horses, the seal cage and some cross cages. By 1913 the circus business was a huge part of Hall's operation although little was mentioned about the horse trade. In fact, less than 1000 horses had been exported from America to England and France in all of 1913. Things would soon dramatically change.

#### 1914

The farm got a little more crowded by mid-January when Art Eldridge returned with the elephants and ponies from his stint at the Hippodrome show in Toronto. The local newspapers, which generally reported circus news accurately, came up short when they announced in mid-January that Eldridge and George Embree were going to take out the old William Coulter show in 1914. In fact, Eldridge left for India to secure a shipment of elephants for Hall. Lou Hall and Ira Ryun had already been to India laying the ground work for such a purchase and had made numerous contacts already.

Max Boyer came to Lancaster in early January to look for equipment for the J. H. Boyer Famous Shows. He selected six sets of reserved seating and requested that Hall ship them to him. Al F. Wheeler came in January to make arrangements for a couple elephants for his Wheeler Bros. Greater Shows. In what was a rather unusual agreement, Hall shipped the two female Asian elephants Queen and Jennie to Wheeler almost immediately. Wheeler replied on January 20 that they had arrived all O.K. He had some concern as there was not a bill for the railroad freight and he wanted to make sure that he was square with Hall. If not, he would make it right immediately, he wrote.<sup>92</sup>

During the month of February, Vernon Seaver of the Young Buffalo show returned two rail cars to Hall in lieu of a \$2400 note he owed.<sup>93</sup> The *Lancaster Excelsior* reported that show folks from Pennsylvania and Maryland were in town buying show equipment but the paper didn't identify them. Hall himself was still out buying horses at the sales barns around the area. On February 13 he bought 100 head of horses. Due to terrible storms, a lot of farmers stayed home; otherwise he might have bought twice as many as he did. He also advertised to buy horses in Massena, Anita, and Weldon, Iowa. Eldridge's wife returned to Lancaster after accompanying her husband as far as New York for his departure overseas. A letter

he mailed to her from the ship said he should be in India by February 28. At some point Hall also bought two more elephants, named Diamond and Trilby, from the Gentry Bros. Circus.

Centerville, Iowa had a good sales barn and Hall and his crew went there looking for the best horses and mules their money could buy in early March. Hall, unfortunately, was called back to Lancaster when some circus people arrived to do business with him, so McClain and the rest of the team took over. McClain, incidentally, had married Ed Lowery's daughter from Centerville a couple years earlier. Hall's associates picked up 200 horses in just this one day. The general price for horses was off a little from the previous year and most notably, there was no demand for the "chunks" or draft horses in the 1600 to 1900 pound category. In March, Hall promptly shipped the Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth fifty-one horses to its Bridgeport winter quarters. According to the Barnum and Bailey ledgers at the Milner Library, Hall sold forty horses for \$315 each, four for \$200 a piece, four more for \$190 each and the last three for \$175 each. Hall also bought five camels and two mules from Barnum and Bailey.

As the circus season neared, elephants started leaving the farm again. Dutch was leased to Yankee Robinson and Juno to Orton Bros. Circus. Muggins, a tuskless male Asian, was sold to the Sells-Floot Circus. Lena was sold to the Gillespie Bros. Circus based in Columbia, South Carolina. She didn't stay there long as she was shot and killed on March 11 by frightened farmers who had never seen an elephant before near Hartsville, South Carolina. A car of western horses and another of draft horses were shipped to New York on March 28th from the farm. One team of horses left en route to St. Louis where it joined the J. H. Boyer Famous Shows. Boyer was well pleased with the team and sent a check for \$350.

Louis Hall returned to the United States on the *S. S. Columbia*. Having departed from Southampton, England, he arrived back in New York on April 15, 1914. Eldridge had bad news when he cabled Hall on April 8 to say thirteen elephants were lost in the mid-Atlantic, certainly a major disappointment. McClain and Eichmere were both buying horses for Hall, eighty-six head in Bloomfield on April 9. The April 10th paper simply stated that for the past two weeks, a number of show cars, wagons and other circus paraphernalia had been sold to people in Chicago, Mississippi, and elsewhere.

The Young Buffalo Wild West Show, which purchased elephants from Hall in the past, turned to him again for forty-five good dapple grey baggage horses.<sup>94</sup> Fred Buchanan wrote to Hall on April 25 to complain that the elephant was no good. Hall replied that the elephant situation would be addressed, which pleased Buchanan. The birth of a camel at the farm was mentioned in the local news on April 17. Buchanan wrote Hall again on April 27 to say that the seals had arrived.

Eldridge finally returned on Monday, May 11. Travelling several days behind him, the seven surviving elephants arrived in Lancaster on May 19. (Four have been identified as Judy, Helen, Lucy and Victor, while three remain nameless.) Eldridge trained them at the farm. One of these young imports was a little male that went to the C. A. Wortham Carnival.<sup>95</sup> Letters as early as May 22 from the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus indicate it paid Hall \$125 a week for the rent of the elephants. Having lost many an elephant in the 1913 floods, the Hall elephants were a strong replacement in 1914.

The A. B. Miller's Greater Shows made a deal with Hall for some horses in 1914. In a letter dated May 24, the carnival sent a

\$100 payment and mentioned the horses were in tip top condition, other than a few with sore necks from being branded. This was the infamous "H" that was branded under the chins of Hall horses for many years. The A. B. Miller Greater Shows had a veterinarian who was treating them.<sup>96</sup> The Allman Bros. Big American Shows leased some equipment from Hall in 1914 with \$50 payments being made. The Allman Carnival had wintered in the Lancaster barns for a few years.

The overseas demand for horses and mules continued as a load of



While Hall is remembered for horses and elephants, he sold other exotic animals as evidenced by the camels in this photo. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

mules was shipped to Hamburg, Germany and another load to Cape Town on June 2. Three letters in the Hall Papers indicate money was received for leasing animals to the Monroe's Mighty Shows for \$300 on June 2. The Young Buffalo show sent a check on June 29 for \$200 for its horses. On July 2, a \$125 payment for elephants was received from the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Toward the end of July as the horse business continued to prosper, the big barn at the Hall farm was enlarged and covered with galvanized steel. The newspaper stated that Hall would be building other buildings to accommodate circus equipment. Lightning struck the recently relocated Stretch barn on July 12 as thunderstorms rolled through. While it didn't cause much damage, the strike killed one horse.

Having acquired the Bulger and Cheney Circus in 1911, the Barrett and Zimmerman Stables had gotten in the circus equipment and horse trading business as well. On July 8, they sold the Sells-Floot and Buffalo Bill show twenty-six good stocky baggage horses and took in a few horses from the show at the same time. The very next day a massive fire that started at the Brooks Bros. Lumberyard next to the stables, destroyed the huge 100' x 310' building which was the Barrett and Zimmerman's main stable barn. While their stock was unharmed, they lost a lot of feed and harness plus one circus tableau wagon. The rest of their circus equipment was safely held elsewhere.<sup>97</sup>

The Young Buffalo Wild West Show had leased elephants from Hall for a couple years. When they were broke and couldn't move anymore, they contacted Hall about buying their show. He came to Alton, Illinois to look things over. He agreed to purchase it and had the show shipped back to Lancaster where it was unloaded the first week in August.<sup>98</sup> The *New York Clipper* stated that he bought all of the show except the coaches and advance cars. A week later, ten horses were shipped to another Wild West show when a stock car caught fire near Granger, Iowa. By the time anyone noticed, the car was engulfed and all the train crew could do was uncouple the car and let it burn. The ten horses perished.



Hall was first and foremost a horse dealer. This picture, probably taken between 1910 and 1914, shows a relatively new horse barn and dozens of draft horses frolicking against the background of the rolling Missouri countryside. Pfening Archives.

World War I began during the summer of 1914. Warfare required quick movement of troops and equipment. Horses were needed at once. Hall was contracted by the English government to get plenty of horses.<sup>99</sup> Several car loads of Calvary horses left the farm in early September for Montreal from which they were shipped to England.

Andrew Downie's LaTena's Big 3 Ring Wild Animal Circus bought animals from Hall. Downie sent a \$520 check on August 6 to pay on his note and indicated he had made a little money and didn't want to get behind in his payments again. Frank A. Robbins was a long-time owner of shows. In 1914, he agreed to buy twenty horses for \$175 each, plus a saddle horse, a baggage horse and completed the deal with a trade for a pair of horses. Robbins owed Hall \$4075. A summary of the payments made was documented in a letter to Hall on August 7. Robbins was also acting as a buyer for Hall in acquiring a kangaroo, a sloth bear, two black buck antelopes, a yak, an Aoudad and a cross bred deer. These were all given to Hall as partial payment for the horses. Robbins had earlier purchased a male leopard, monkeys and birds from Hall. While the horse business was good, the exotic animal trade was favorable as well.<sup>100</sup>

Hall bought the old Lancaster House, north of the square in mid-September. His people started repairing and remodeling it immediately so he could use it for all his employees. Sometime in 1914, Hall bought a huge male Asian elephant called Chief from the Barnum and Bailey show. Hall had to feed all the animals in his care. Having bought over 16,000 bushels of oats in 1913 to feed all his stock from Briggs and Sons, he received a second car of oats from Briggs during the third week of September. The 16,000 bushels equals 19,900 cubic feet of space or over a half a million pounds of oats.<sup>101</sup> On September 27, ninety more Calvary horses were shipped to Canada for the English forces.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus continued its lease payments of \$125 for the elephants into October. As the circus season wound down, Hall bought the Sig Sautelle Circus. By the middle of October, the fifteen car show was brought to Lancaster, except for the horses which were not included in the sale.<sup>102</sup> Al Wheeler wrote on the 21st of October offering many animals for sale. Queen and Jennie, his two elephants, were doing a wonderful fifteen minute act. He didn't want to sell them as he felt like he had work for them during the winter at good money. The Miller Bros. wrote on October 28 to buy 250 horses as they had a contract to supply horses to the

Greek army.

As a broker of entertainment equipment, Hall dealt with all forms of the outdoor and indoor amusement industry. The *New York Clipper* reported on November 7 that Doc Zeigler was heading to Lancaster to buy a coach for his Negro minstrel show. Several more car loads of Calvary horses were loaded and shipped on November 9. Two days later Hall bought horses from the Howe's Great London Shows. A letter from co-owner Jerry Mugivan stated he had draft horses for \$110 each plus thirteen broncos at \$40 each. Hall's bill was \$2610 and the horses shipped on November 18. The Barnum and Bailey financial records reveal that

Hall bought seventeen horses from them on November 14, 1914 for \$2125 or \$125 each. This was a far cry from the almost \$300 a piece he had sold horses to Barnum and Bailey back in the spring-time. It was easier for the show to unload their stock rather than feed it all winter.

Charles Wilson of the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows contacted Hall about a railroad coach from the Barnum and Bailey show that had been shipped out west to C. B. Irwin but missed a connection somewhere and was sitting in the Chicago yards. Would Hall be interested in it? He wasn't unless Ringling would take horses for payment next spring. He then asked if Ringling had any animals for sale. The Ringlings replied they only had elephants and could provide four or five if he wanted them.<sup>103</sup> Other correspondence followed and eventually Hall bought a camel and a yak from the show. The Barnum and Bailey Cash Books show that Hall apparently did buy the coach stuck in Chicago as he paid \$800 for one on November 13, 1914.

Closing out the year, the Gillespie Bros. Circus, a wagon show, was out of business and now stranded in Virginia. Hall bought the show and had it shipped to his farm.<sup>104</sup> As the year was coming to a close, George Rollins bought an animal act and two elephants. (We can only assume these were two of the elephants that were imported in 1914.) Hall admitted to the *Lancaster Excelsior* that 1914 had been the biggest business year of his life.

Art Eldridge and Hall joined all the Hall employees for their Christmas dinner in what was called Hotel Hall. The tables were set and the holiday meal consisted of hot rum punch, individual plates of raw oysters, oyster soup, celery, mashed potatoes, French peas in cream sauce, sweet potatoes, red Missouri apple casserole, roasted Missouri gobbler with oyster filling, New England plum pudding, lemon pie, cake, cheese, wafers, nuts, fruit, coffee, tea, and milk.

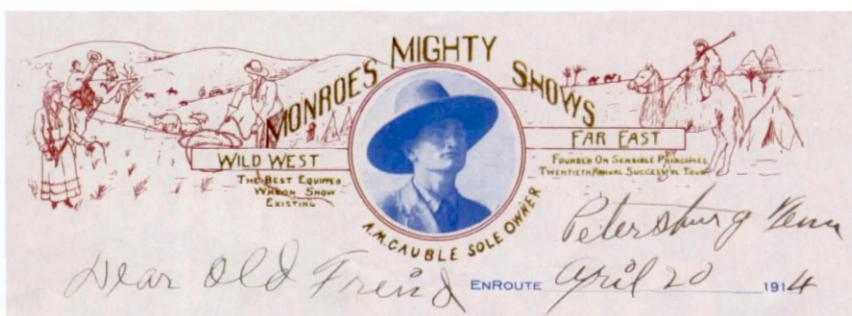
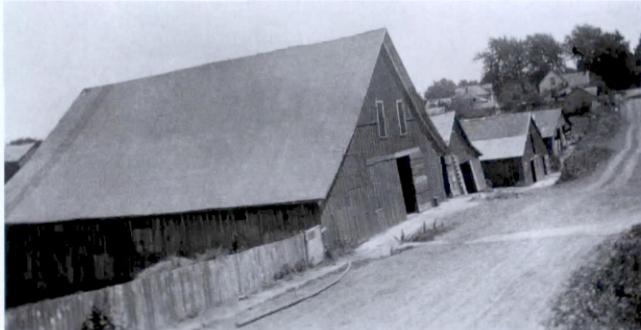
Archie Dunlap had joined the organization and was now in charge of all the elephants.<sup>105</sup> **BW**

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Barn line from the opposite direction. By the time of this 1932 photo the colorful graphics along the fence at left had long faded. Ralph Hadley photo, Pfening Archives.



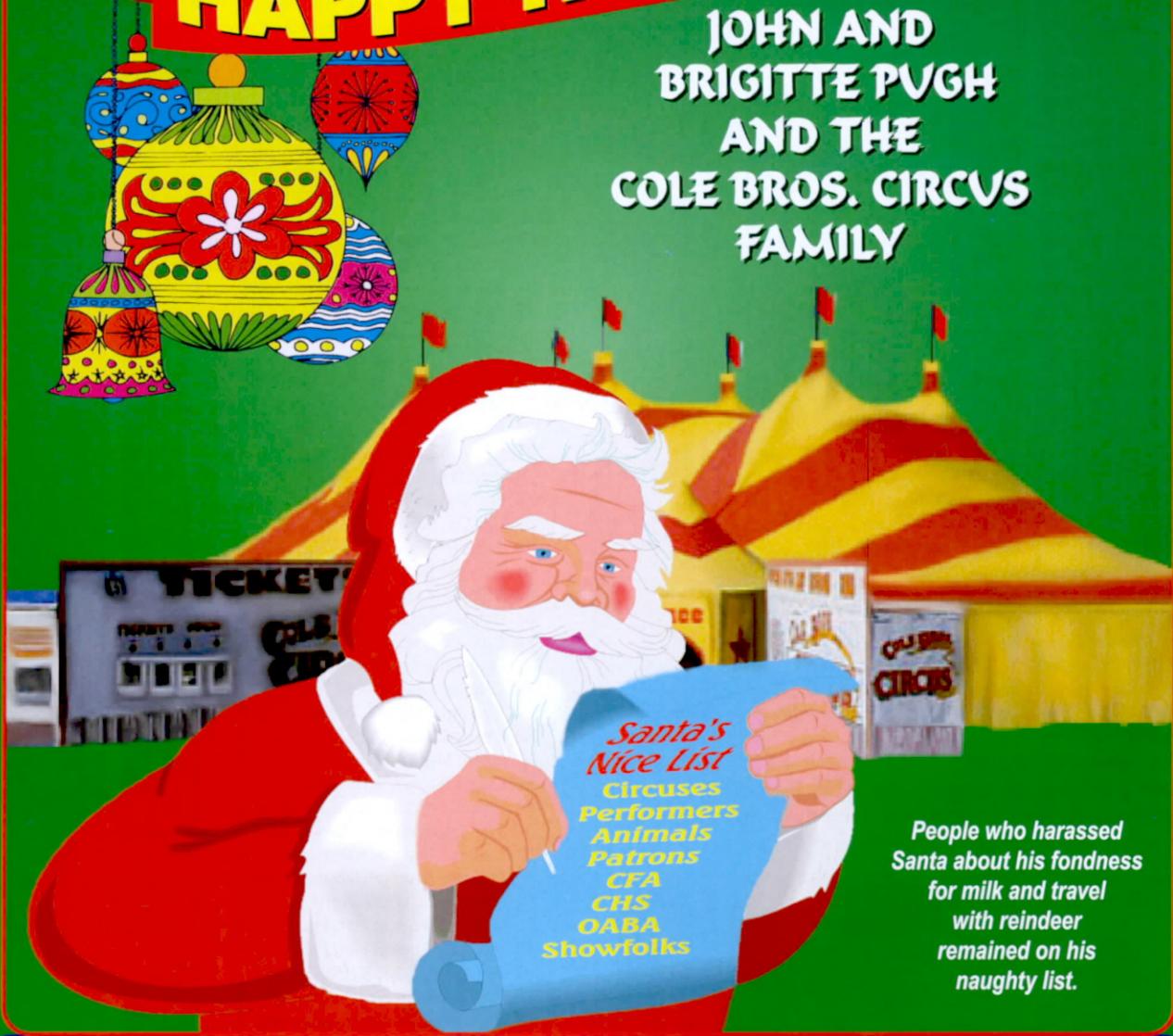
Wagon show proprietor Albert M. Cauble leased animals from Hall in the early 1910s. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.

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# COLE BROS. CIRCUS OF THE STARS

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JOHN AND  
BRIGITTE PUGH  
AND THE  
COLE BROS. CIRCUS  
FAMILY



Santa's  
Nice List  
Circuses  
Performers  
Animals  
Patrons  
CFA  
CHS  
OABA  
Showfolks

People who harassed  
Santa about his fondness  
for milk and travel  
with reindeer  
remained on his  
naughty list.

**THE WORLD'S LARGEST CIRCUS UNDER THE BIG TOP**



*Isn't it strange that princes and kings  
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings  
And common folks like you and me  
Are builders of eternity?*

*To each is given a bag of tools,  
A shapeless mass and a book of rules,  
And each must make, ere life has flown,  
A stumbling block or a steppingstone.*

*from Ideals Magazine*

***Have a Joyous Holiday  
Bill & Jan  
The Circus Report***

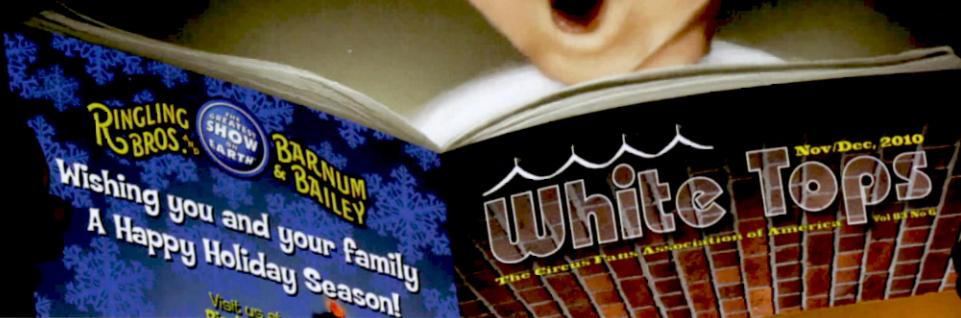
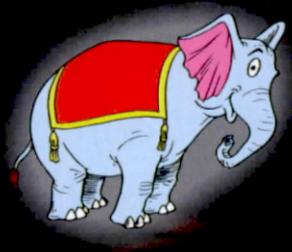
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# Barnum & Bailey in the Old World

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr., Curator of Circus History, John and Mable Ringling Museum, Florida State University



**James A. Bailey's removal of his Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth from North America to Europe from late 1897 to 1902 still ranks as the most audacious business action ever undertaken by an American circus man.** He essentially forsook the proven home territory of his flagship circus, leaving it to be protected by his number two Forepaugh-Sells circus and the quasi-circus Buffalo Bill's Wild West. They were to hold it against the increasingly successful predations of the five Ringling brothers and their World's Greatest Shows.

Bailey was already the most traveled of American circus men. His closest rivals in international travel were William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Nate Salsbury, who had taken their western-themed aggregation to Europe twice between 1887 and 1892.

Richard Sands, Seth Howes and other one-ring entrepreneurs had journeyed to England with American circuses in the 1840s and 1850s, with Barnum and Bailey taking their three-ringer to the mammoth Olympia building in London for the 1889-1890 winter season. Bailey had previously taken his Cooper, Bailey & Co. outfit to Australia, New Zealand and an abbreviated visit of South America in 1877-1878. It was preceded by one of the first transcontinental circus tours, originating in St. Louis and crossing much of the Midwest before terminating in San Francisco, where it positioned him for his Pacific Ocean voyage. While followed "down under" by W. W. Cole in late 1880 and the Sells Bros. in 1891, none of his contemporaries or subsequent American showmen displayed his willingness to risk everything on another extended trip. The daring demeanor represented by his five year trip abroad cannot be understated, but the execution of it merely reinforced his reputation for being a master of logistics and details.

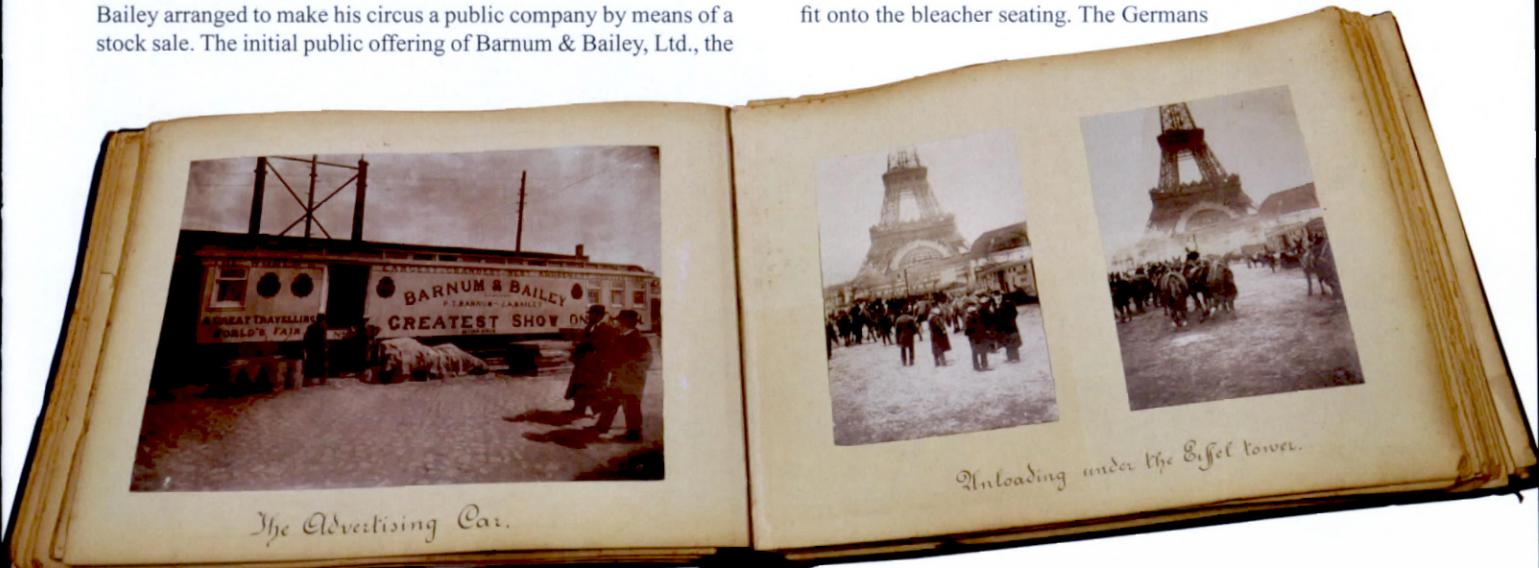
Based on the superb results of the 1898 season in England, Bailey arranged to make his circus a public company by means of a stock sale. The initial public offering of Barnum & Bailey, Ltd., the

new corporate entity, was over-subscribed. He sold the physical plant of his circus to investors, while retaining a controlling interest and personal rights to the Barnum & Bailey title and Greatest Show on Earth slogan. Even if it had failed, he would have more than recouped his entire investment before setting foot on board the ship that took the Greatest Show on Earth to the continent. His take from the sale was in excess of a million and a half dollars, a record not eclipsed until many decades later.

With no base of operations overseas, Bailey sent three lieutenants, Louis E. Cooke, Joseph T. McCaddon and George O. Starr, ahead to arrange for a suitable quarters, the construction of a special train of cars, and other arrangements necessary to support a complete 60-car show. Satisfactory arrangements were concluded with W. R. Renshaw of Stoke-on-Trent, which enabled them to settle the real estate and transport needs in short order. Thereafter the principal task became planning and contracting the route and arranging for daily logistics of travel, support and presentation.

While European circuses had always featured some of the world's greatest ring talent, no European showman, single-handedly, or in concert with others, ever put on an exhibition as grand as the Greatest Show on Earth. Whether it was the tent city, the street parade, or the big top show, the myriad measures of the Bailey enterprise outclassed all other traveling shows in England and on the continent.

Barnum & Bailey was a true American circus, the only foreign component being the British-built train. Everything else, the tents, wagons, properties and the majority of the staff, cast and crew were of American origin. Even the advertising was done American style. The art nouveau style of illustration, then popular on continental posters, was not used. One of the few surprises took place in Germany. The revenues dropped because not as many people could fit onto the bleacher seating. The Germans



had broader beams than other Europeans.

In the streets the Europeans saw: Fielding band chariots, and tableau cages decorated with carvings from Samuel Robb, box body tableaus, eight pony floats, and a steam calliope. It was vintage equipment, but in good shape, and made such a flash in the street that the Germans reportedly felt there was nothing more to see inside the tents.

The circus got reams of press coverage. Harvey L. Watkins, one of the show's press agents, composed and published a dandy volume, *Four Years in Europe, The Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth In the Old World* in 1901, the most detailed account of the adventure. Agents Louis E. Cooke and Dexter Fellows recalled their involvement in their memoirs, as did Joseph T. McCaddon in his unpublished manuscript. Richard E. Conover, the first historian to analyze Bailey's papers chronicling the tour, published several monographs that have withstood the test of time.

A surprising number of large artifacts from the tour survive. Circus World Museum is home to three of the fairy tale pony floats, Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe, Mother Goose, and Cinderella; two tableau cages and the carvings from a third; as well as corner images from the show's organ wagon and parts of a tableau. The unrestored body of one of the Renshaw-built sleeping cars reposes in storage in a British railroad museum.

Hundreds of lithographs, route books and cards, programs, couriers, heralds, newspaper accounts, and even a few railroad contracts document the tour. Abundant pictures, including several sets of souvenir postcards, provide a visual record of the journey. A large album, containing 169 prints taken between 1898 and 1902, is one of the richest photographic sources. It appears to have been a presentation copy, perhaps one of many given to circus executives as a memento of the undertaking. Each image has a short caption written in beautiful handwriting. It was apparently once owned by Joseph T. McCaddon, Bailey's brother-in-law; at least McCaddon noted he had removed a few photos from the volume. The book was purchased by Fred Pfening, Jr. from P. M. McClintock, the antique and circusiana dealer, in the late 1960s, and is now part of Pfening Archives. Original captions from the album are set in quotations. **BW**



"The elephants in parade." Leaving the lot for parade in Chester, England, October 4, 1898, or June 14, 1899. Many towns were on the route both seasons the show played the United Kingdom.



"The kennel cage." Location unknown.



"The range wagon in action." Location unknown.



"The healthiest stables on Earth."  
Baggage horse top, location unknown.



"The Side Show ready." Crowd watches bally in front of side show in England, 1898 or 1899.



"The running stock ready." Performing horses being unload in Paris under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, November 1901.



"Unloading Trains at Halensee, Berlin."  
Onlookers watch the circus train unload in  
the Halensee district of Berlin, mid-May 1900.



"Detraining the Elephants." Berlin, mid-May 1900.



"The Parade in Berlin." Lady chariot drivers, mid-May 1900.



"The women's Circus in rehearsal, Berlin." This display was called "The New Woman Supreme in the Arena" when Barnum and Bailey opened in London's Olympia at the end of 1897. It was composed of three female riders, three female clowns and three female "Lady Ringmasters." By the time the show reached Berlin, the emphasis on the all-female production was toned down.



"The 'Freaks' Platform, Berlin, 1900." Sideshow line up just before "doors." Sol Stone, lightning calculator on left.

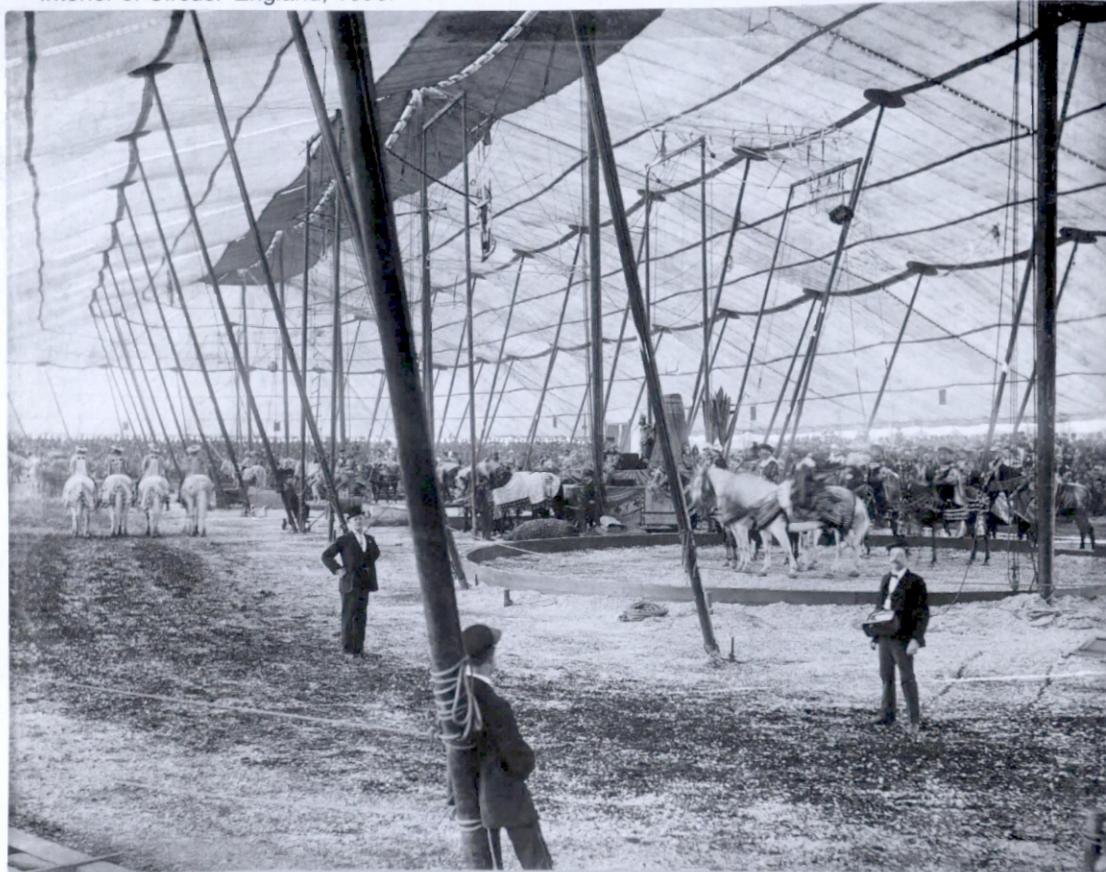


"Old Fritz Appears." Location unknown. This elephant was put down in Tours, France in mid-June 1902 after causing trouble. James A. Bailey never hesitated to take out a troublesome elephant. Tip, another big male bull, was also dispatched during the tour.



"Interior of Menagerie—The Freaks." Sideshow and menagerie combined in England, 1898.

"Interior of Circus." England, 1898.





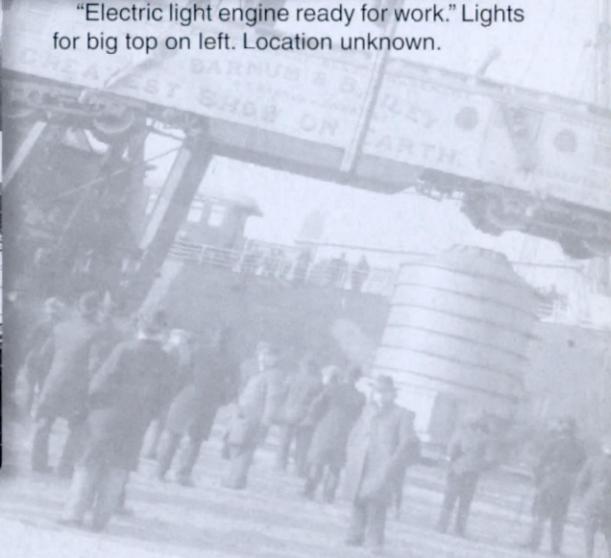
"Crowd at Lyon, France, 1902." The show appeared in Lyon from March 30 to April 10, 1902.



"Electric light engine ready for work." Lights for big top on left. Location unknown.

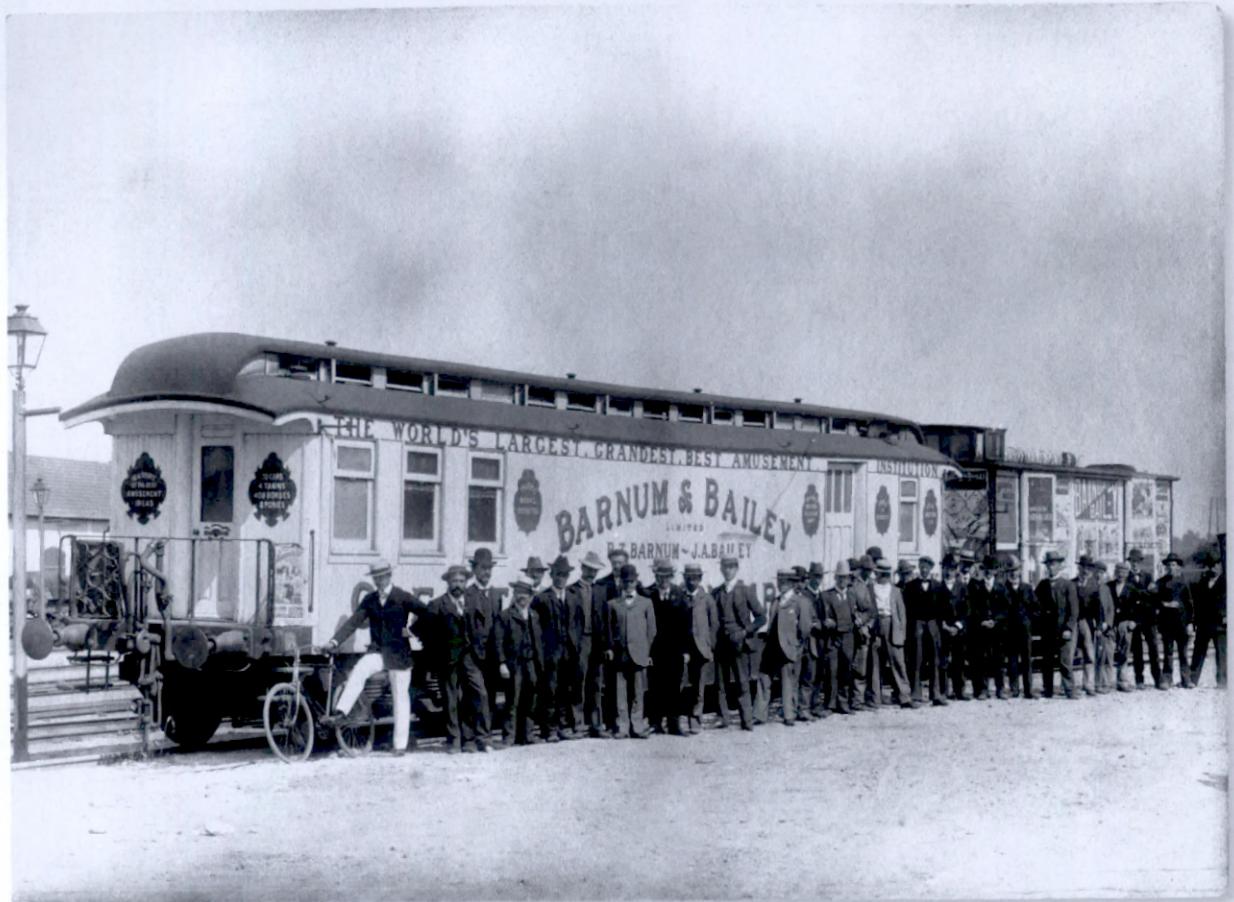


"The 'big top' spread." Sea of canvas at Tours, France, March 1902.





"The river's green bank, Toulouse, 1902." The crowd is watching the tail-end of the set up as sideshow banner line hasn't been raised. The show was in Toulouse, France from May 15 to 18, 1902.



"Advance Car and its trailer, Nevers, 1902." Show at Nevers, France, July 26. Note small car, probably used to store lithographs and other advertising, behind advance car. Bill crew of approximately thirty-three men was bigger than most.



"Mandarin at Lucerne, 1902." Mandarin must have been a tough customer. His legs are shackled, and a chain and guard are over his trunk, presumably to keep him from sapping anyone within striking distance. Mandarin was part of the shipment received by the Howes Great London Circus in 1871, and sired the first surviving elephant born in America in 1880. Lucerne, Switzerland, August 27, 1902.



"Deep in the mud, Thiers, France, 1902." Photo taken August 1, 1902.





WISHES  
YOU AND YOURS

# Happy Holidays!

JIM ELLIOTT  
GENERAL MANAGER



# Amid Ruins of 1938 Season Last Two Railers Made Big Showings in Atlanta

By Lane Talburt

*The financially disastrous 1938 circus season has been well documented in countless magazine articles and books. This story will shed additional light on the epic battle between Ringling executive John Ringling North and union organizers which led to the closing of the Greatest Show on Earth and its temporary rebirth, sporting one of the longest, most confusing titles in American circus history.*

Three weeks and two big tops separated the fall 1938 appearances in Atlanta of a trio of America's best known and most accomplished wild animal trainers.

And four-year-old Richard J. Reynolds III, later president of Circus Historical Society, tagged along with his dad to see the two remaining railroad circuses in a checkered, Depression-era season.

First to set up on the Highland Avenue show grounds for four shows on October 17-18 was the Famous Robbins Circus with Clyde Beatty, a 20-car outfit (with another car in advance) augmented by principal performers and rolling stock from the shuttered Cole Bros. Circus.

Robbins Bros was greeted by newspaper ads urging fans to "wait" for a November 7-8 stand by a rival more than twice the size at 50 cars—the Al G. Barnes, Sells-Floto Combined Circuses with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's Stupendous New Features. The latter show provided Atlantans the opportunity to witness the routines of lion king Terrell Jacobs from Ringling-Barnum and tiger queen Mabel Stark of the Barnes-Floto show.

"This is the only instance in my lifetime that two shows ran 'wait' and 'why wait' campaigns here," Reynolds noted in a February 14, 2009, e-mail to the author.

The "why wait" Robbins ad cautioned circus goers: "Don't be deceived by tricky and misleading advertising." The Ringling show, it pointed out, "officially closed the season on June 27th at Scranton, Pa., and returned to Winter Quarters. [The actual closing date was June 22.]

"Consequently . . . it positively will not exhibit in Atlanta this year."

Not so fast, countered the Barnes-Sells Floto display. "The World's Greatest Show Is Positively Coming to Atlanta." Despite the confusing title, there could be no doubt from the prominence of the Ringling-Barnum name in display ads and billboard and window daubs that the Big One was solidly behind this outfit. And most circus fans could have cared less about the union problems that earlier had caused North to shutter the Greatest Show on Earth before invading the South under an assumed name.

As promised, the two cobbled-together circuses delivered the goods. Locomotives of the Southern railroad (now Norfolk Southern) pulled both outfits onto the Highland Avenue sidings adjacent to the East Atlanta lot on a Sunday for Monday-Tuesday performances.

"I saw [Robbins Bros] as well as the street parade on Monday morning [October 17th]," Reynolds recalled. "That was the last old

time street parade by a railroad show in Atlanta using horse drawn wagons."

Reynolds' senior colleague, circus historian Joseph Bradbury, reported that "Atlanta produced the best two-day business of the season" for Robbins Bros. In the March-April 1967 installment of his *Bandwagon* epic on the history of Cole Bros., Bradbury penned that "the Barnes wait signs did not deter the Atlanta crowds" for the smaller show.

Despite North's ability to pull from a larger stable of attractions with Frank "Bring 'em Back Alive" Buck and Gargantua the Great being the most heavily ballyhooed, the line up of performers and the variety of animal acts on Robbins Bros, including cowboy movie star Hoot Gibson in the concert, would have pleased the most discriminating circus fan. Even before Clyde Beatty's arrival on the Jess Adkins-run unit in mid-August, "it is doubted that a finer 15 car circus ever existed," opined Bradbury in a June 1955 *Bandwagon* story.

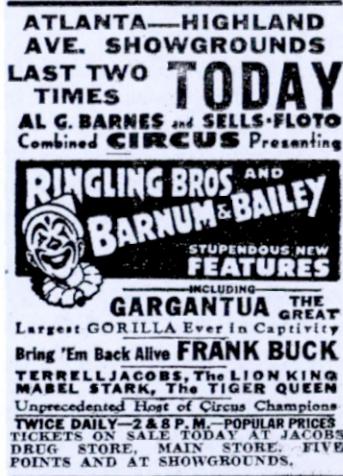
Beatty brought along his wife Harriett, and her tiger-riding-elephant routine to beef up the Robbins roster. "The addition of Clyde and Harriett Beatty's wild animal acts were a major improvement to the performance," Bradbury wrote in the March-April 1967 *Bandwagon*, "and the enlarged Robbins show was now a first class circus in every respect and fully capable of playing any size city on the proposed Southern route."

Not to be outshined, Barnes-Sells Floto doubled up with a horse-riding lion presented by Terrell Jacobs' wife Dolly, and Diane Lovett's elephant-riding tiger.

Another audience-pleasing wild-animal act on Barnes-Ringling was Pallenberg's bears. Robbins advertised three rings of sea lions. Barnes boasted Walter McClain's seventeen elephants in three rings; Robbins carried ten, which were used in the daily parade.

In the equestrian realm, Ringling presented not only the Cristiani family, spending its first full season on Big Bertha, but also the Riding Rieffenbacks with comic Clarence Bruce; Jack Joyce's liberty horses, and the Mitzi-Rose sisters, bareback riding

Newspaper ad for Barnes-Ringling Circus in Atlanta, November 7 and 8, 1938. The Ringling-Barnum portion of the title received much bigger billing than the Barnes-Floto part. Richard J. Reynolds III collection.



ballerinas. Robbins billed the Hobson Family, "Champion Riders of Europe;" John Smith's liberty horses and three rings of high school horses.

Here are some of the other match-ups: Flying acts: Barnes-Ringling: the Comets, the Concellos (with Antoinette Concello) and the Randolls. Robbins: the Flying Thrillers and Aerial Behees. High-wire: Barnes-Ringling: Wallenda-Grotfent and Nattio troupes. Robbins: "three rings of wire acts—Ramona Sisters, Senor Velarde, Armata." Felix Adler and Paul Jung (both from Ringling) anchored the Barnes clown alley, while Otto Griebing came over to Robbins from the closed Cole show.

Both circuses offered strengthened menageries as well as a sideshow. Ironically, the smaller circus owed its title to the manager of its kid show, Milton Robbins. In fact, partners Zack Terrell and Adkins were able to use the Robbins title for their second unit only because they leased it in February 1938 from Milt and his mother, the widow of Frank A. Robbins.

The trains of both shows were a mish-mash of cars, with the Robbins Bros. fleet consisting of a half-dozen units borrowed from Cole Bros, the latter title simply being blotted over rather than being repainted to match the 15 Robbins cars.

Due to the size of the united Barnes and Ringling rolling stock, no attempt was made to give the fleet a common appearance. As Joe Bradbury noted in the March-April 1984 *White Tops*: "The train was a colorful sight with intermingling of the cars from the two circuses. There were orange with silver lettered Barnes stock and flat cars and Ringling flats painted silver (aluminum) with red lettering. Also there were the red lettered and silver lettered Barnes coaches and Ringling-Barnum sleepers painted Pullman green with car names and title in gold."

Both shows also were highly competitive in the billing department, but again, the Barnes-Ringling combo had the advantage, sending out two advance cars to Robbins' one. Robbins "got some good daubs in Atlanta," Bradbury noted in his March-April 1967 *Bandwagon* article, "and had a wonderful banner showing on the former site of the Terminal Hotel."

A smattering of Barnes-Sells Floto lithographs included the legendary John Robinson title. Reynolds pointed out, "that was done to counter a claim by one of the Robinson family members that RBBB had abandoned the Robinson title and that it ought to revert to the Robinson family."

More than 70 years after the two circuses made their Atlanta stands on the same Highland Avenue lot, Reynolds still clearly remembered his visits to both shows. The Ringling-backed show, in particular, left an indelible imprint on four-year-old Richard's mind.

"On Sunday I went with my parents to watch them setting up," Reynolds wrote in 2009. "Then, I saw the Tuesday (November 8th) matinee. It

had rained early Tuesday ushering in a cold front. By the time of that matinee the temperature had dropped to 47 degrees with high winds and overcast skies. I was there that day with my Dad, wearing my snow suit (that's what my folks told me). . . .

"I have recollections of the following: Clown Felix Adler was in the menagerie tent and picked me up. There was a cage of spotted hyenas in the menagerie, also a giraffe (I recall it from Sunday afternoon when I was there with my folks for the set up and a show guy lifted the menagerie sidewall so we could peek inside.).

"From the performance: Mable Stark in a white outfit . . . trained zebras . . . hippo Lotus on the hippodrome track (I also saw her on Sunday when they took the sideboards off her cage to water her) . . . Frank Buck in his howdah . . . the Gargantua cage coming around the track.

"I would like to say that I can recall the Crisitanis doing their number, but I cannot. I do recall that they were on the show around this time when I saw it and my father called their name. All I can remember is sort of a blur of folks on horses. . . .

"Just think, within a month I saw three of the all time great animal trainers—Clyde Beatty with Robbins and Mable Stark and Terrell Jacobs with Barnes-SF."

Ultimately, however, size and depth of resources—financial, human and animal—did matter. Though Robbins benefitted from the outstanding managerial talents of Adkins and Terrell, and the booking genius of Floyd King, the Barnes-Ringling juggernaut had no peer when it came to promoting, moving and staging a show. An article in the June-July 1938 *White Tops*, the magazine of the Circus Fans Association, pointed out that, "George W. Smith, General Manager of the Ringling Show, has replaced J. B. Austin and Fred DeWolf, Treasurer. A score of the members of his staff from the Ringling show also have joined. The entire Ringling Show press department is with the Barnes-Sells Floto organization. Pat Valdo is in charge of performer personnel and Merle Evans is directing the band in the big top." Evans displaced Barnes band director Eddie Woeckener on the combined circus.

Alas, the Robbins railer lacked the financial muscle to absorb early-season losses along its Midwestern-Canadian-Northeastern route and those of its larger touring sister. Even with the booster shot of talent and equipment from the Cole show, closed since August 3, Robbins Bros was unable to reverse its ill fortunes at the front door. Robbins unexpectedly made its last stand on October 22 at Decatur, Alabama, foregoing the already billed final two towns on the route. Leaving some performers and workers stranded, the train returned to winter quarters in Rochester, Indiana, with the six cars borrowed from its sister organization.

On the other hand, the Barnes-Floto-Ringling

**WHY WAIT?  
Wait for What?**

**Don't Be  
DECEIVED  
By Tricky and  
Misleading  
Advertising**

**The  
RINGLING BROS. &  
BARNUM & BAILEY  
CIRCUS**

**Officially Closed Its Season on  
June 29th, at Scranton, Pa., and  
Returned to Winter Quarters . . .**

**Consequently . . .  
It Positively Will Not  
Exhibit in Atlanta This  
Year**

**AMERICA'S  
FOREMOST CIRCUS  
Will Arrive **TODAY**  
At the Circus Grounds  
on Highland Avenue  
AND WILL EXHIBIT  
**TOMORROW**  
AND **TUESDAY****

**THE OLD RELIABLE  
FAMOUS  
ROBBINS  
CIRCUS**

**CLYDE  
BEATTY**  
Greatest Wild Animal  
Trainer Of All Time

**HOOT GIBSON**  
Famous Western Movie  
Star and Great  
Rodeo Rider

**BIGGER—GRANDER—THAN EVER!  
AN ECLIPSING EPOCH IN THE  
WORLD'S OUTSTANDING  
AMUSEMENT INSTITUTION**

Newspaper ad for the Robbins Bros. Circus, using the title Famous Robbins, in Atlanta on October 17 and 18, 1938.  
Richard J. Reynolds III collection

conglomeration persevered through the remainder of its retooled 1938 tour and closed November 27 in Sarasota, its home town.

Compared to union problems that plagued the Greatest Show on Earth from day one of the 1938 season, the competition from Robbins Bros probably was of little consequence to John Ringling's nephew. After wresting control of Ringling-Barnum from Samuel Gumpertz in late 1937, the 34-year-old North repudiated a union contract which would have paid \$60 a month plus room and board.

Citing a deterioration of the nation's economy from a brief upsurge, the young circus executive demanded that the union take a salary cut to \$42.50. Ironically, this was the amount of the eventual settlement in late 1938, but not before North and union president Ralph Whitehead staged an epic battle that lead to Ringling-Barnum being forced to cancel the night performance in Scranton, Pennsylvania, on June 22.

Contemporary accounts in *Billboard*, the circus industry's trade paper, and *White Tops*, the magazine of the Circus Fans Association, as well as later accounts by circus historians Bradbury and Tom Parkinson, provide a blow-by-blow description of the antics of labor and management.



Panoramic view of Ringling-Barnum big top on left and baggage horse tent at Scranton, Pennsylvania, June 24, 1938, two days after strikers closed the show. City of Scranton is behind mounds of coal. Bob Good photo, Pfening Archives.

A recent internet search by the author of 1938 wire service dispatches and news articles in the Sarasota and Scranton papers, as well as the *New York Times*, has fleshed out the opera.

In retrospect, North's decision to close the Ringling-Barnum show in Scranton may have provided the template for a similar move 18 years later by the anti-union showman. The major difference between the two union-related incidents was that Big Bertha returned to the road to complete the 1938 tour following a brief layover in Sarasota. That wasn't the case in 1956 when the impetuous North, similarly pulling the plug in Pittsburgh on July 16, cancelled not only the remainder of the season but also declared an end to Ringling-Barnum's fabled under-canvas era.

Bear in mind that North did not have the option in 1956 of salvaging the tour by reopening under a different umbrella. The other Ringling-owned properties, Barnes-Floto and Hagenbeck-Wallace, did not return to the road after being hauled to winter quarters at the close of the 1938 season, never to appear again. The John Robinson title also was retired.

A July 18, 1938, United Press dispatch summarized the plight of the Greatest Show on Earth at mid-year: "Ringling Brothers started the season under new management with what was said to be its greatest combination of performers, roustabouts and animals in history. Newly 'streamlined,' it started out with expectations of a great season.

"John Ringling North and his brother, Henry, had with the aid of an aunt, Mrs. Charles Ringling, acquired control of the circus in December, 1937. . . .

"Labor trouble developed at the opening in Madison Square Gar-

den, however, and flared up again in Scranton, after the circus had run into a streak of bad show weather."

The Associated Press reported that the flashpoint leading up to the closing occurred two days before the hobbled show reached the Pennsylvania coal-mining city. "Syracuse, N.Y., June 20—(AP)—Circus tents sprouted like mushrooms here today [Monday] a few hours after a deadline by John Ringling North . . . for disbanding the show if employees refused to accept a 25 per cent cut in pay.

"Employees found in dressing rooms a notice from North thanking them for accepting the reduction, but a union official said the pay cut had not been accepted.

"Employees said a threatened showdown, which North said would come today, had been deferred until Wednesday when the circus pulls into Scranton, Pa."

Circus goers at Binghamton, New York, had the opportunity to see two full Ringling-Barnum performances on Tuesday, June 21.

An AP follow-up dated Thursday, July 23, announced the fate of North's extravaganza: "Scranton—Tied up by a strike of 1,600 employees, the . . . circus remained in Scranton today. Only a few men who appeared to feed the animals were on the lot where the circus tents had been pitched yesterday and the circus trains remained on the circus sidings. . . .

"Rumblings of dissatisfaction among the circus workers . . . came to a head after the matinee yesterday. The 1,600 employees held a mass meeting in the grandstand of athletic park, which adjoins the circus grounds, and voted 'no' on the proposal to accept the cut. Ralph Whitehead, executive secretary of the American Federation of Actors, addressed the meeting. . . .

"Between 4,000 and 5,000 people were in the big top for the evening performance when the management announced that 'due to conditions over which we have no control there will be no performance tonight. You can get your money back at the ticket wagon.'

"Men and women rushed for the wagons and extra police were called to aid the army of bluecoats already on the circus grounds.

"Animals were being fed on the lot today by supervisors and foremen. The majority of the workers and performers, however, remained away from the show grounds. Most of the strikers slept last night in the grandstand at the baseball park, but some of the performers slept in the sleepers on the circus train. . . ."

According to the UP, the bellicose attitude of the 900 striking circus workers who actually belonged to the actors unit of the American Federation of Labor spread beyond the confines of the circus lot on Friday, June 24. "Mayor Fred Huestler today ordered the strike-beset . . . circus to leave Scranton 'forthwith.'

"The mayor told John Ringling North . . . that continued presence of the circus was a menace to public health.

"The removal notice was served on North by the mayor as North was continuing mediation conferences with federal and state arbitrators and representatives of the . . . striking employees."

Matters worsened on Saturday, June 25, when the AP reported: "Officials of [the circus] sought a way tonight to leave town, and studied where to take the big show that has been tied up by a wage dispute.

"As conferences were held with striking employees and [the mayor], two newspaper photographers were killed in the crash of an airplane from which they were taking pictures of the almost deserted circus grounds. It crashed a few feet from the big top."

That same night North and the union boss reached an agreement whereby union members would tear down the show and move it to winter quarters.



In a bizarre twist to an already bizarre situation two news photographers were killed when their airplane crashed on the circus lot at Scranton on June 24. Photo shows one of the men being carried from the wreckage. Bob Good photo, Pfening Archives.

A follow-up AP story on Monday, June 25, reflected the sighs of relief that many Ringling veterans must have had: "The big top and other tents came down this afternoon as the canvas men and roustabouts went back to work, assured of contract wages until the equipment is stored for the season at Sarasota. Soon after the agreement was signed North was served with a summons requiring him to answer two suits charging him with violation of the three year contract [Gumpertz] signed with the union a year ago.

"Whitehead told North he was 'sorry to see the circus go back to winter quarters because so many people would not have employment.'

"I'm sorry too," North said, "but I offered the union an opportunity to look over my books and see for themselves that we're not making money. But they refused."

Rainy weather that had plagued the show along its route returned with a vengeance that same day, as again reported by AP: "A thunderstorm delayed the 'home' trip of the . . . circus tonight but it was still scheduled for the storehouse because of a labor dispute.

"Instead of being loaded on the big steel cars, the drenched canvas of the big top and the scores of lesser tents were left stretched to dry so that there would be no danger of spontaneous combustion on the long trip to Sarasota, Fla. There is no danger in wet canvas on the regular short overnight jumps of a regular schedule, officials said."

A week after the shutdown, the AP was able to deliver good news, tempered by ill feelings among the stranded work force, on Wednesday, June 28. "Circus officials and performers—some nearly in tears—watched roustabouts working in a heavy rain run the last wagon aboard the circus trains for the journey to winter quarters at Sarasota, Fla.

"I'm heartbroken," said Fred Bradna, ringmaster, who has been with the circus 38 years. "I can't believe the show is closing."

"It was the first time in the 54-year-old history of the circus that a strike had cut short the 30-week season. . . . Rumors that the circus might be sold piecemeal was dispelled by President John Ringling North. 'We have a \$30,000 nut in the treasury and we'll be starting on the road again next season.'"

The June 28 *New York Times* had a different take on the loading, as indicated by its headings: "Packing of circus begun in rain as stars threaten union head; performers charge across the 'big top' to denounce Whitehead for halt in tour and police prevent clash with roustabouts idle since last week."

Commenting on the pro-labor mindset in the Pennsylvania anthracite city, the Sarasota *Herald* on June 28 editorialized: "The pastimes of strike-bound circus folk, especially the sideshow per-

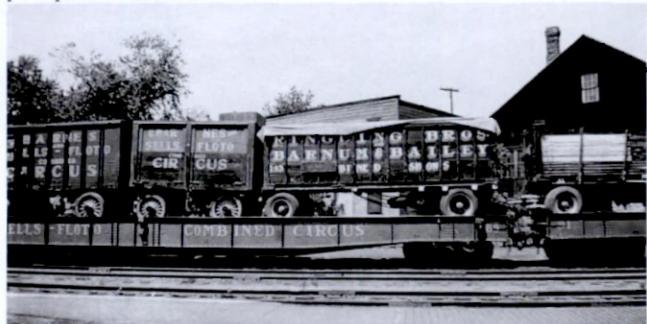
formers, provided excellent picture for the [Scranton] *Tribune*. Also prominently featured was a war of words between Whitehead and Frank Buck. Buck referred to Whitehead as a 'czar,' and the latter retaliated by changing Buck's famous nickname to 'Bring 'em Back Half-Baked.'"

Another story in the same newspaper expressed the concerns of Sarasota officials about the lackluster job market awaiting returning circus people: "No information was available here today as to the number of men coming in with the show, but local authorities expected between 200 and 300 performers and workmen, many of whom have homes here. City and county officials were today studying plans for emergency action should the return of the show bring a large number of unemployed men into the city. . . .

A spokesman for the local WPA office said that while those men owning homes here and hence are able to provide residence, could be certified for relief, but getting jobs was another matter. . . .

"Current WPA wages in this county are \$24.32 per 16-day month. Scheduled increases should bring this figure to approximately \$30 per month in the near future.

"Oddly enough, \$30 per month, plus board was, for years, the standard wage of circus workmen. In recent seasons, it has been increased to \$45, plus board. A contract signed last season by former General Manager Sam W. Gumpertz boosted this figure to \$60. The attempt by John Ringling North to cut this figure back to \$45 precipitated the strike."



No effort was made to re-title any wagons after the Ringling-Barnum equipment was added to the Barnes-Floto Circus at Redfield, South Dakota on July 11. Here a Ringling-Barnum and two Barnes-Floto baggage wagons are loaded upon a Barnes-Floto flat. Location and date unknown, 1938. Pfening Archives.

En route to Sarasota, the Ringling trains were parked for almost 24 hours on a siding in Alexandria, Virginia. Headlines in the June 29th *New York Times* took an optimistic tone: "Circus May Resume; 'Big Show,' Southbound, Halts Near Capital for Conferences."

Joining North and General Manager George Smith in last-minute talks to keep the show alive was prominent Washington attorney Melvin Hildreth, who also served as national president of Circus Fans Association of America.

The AP reported that the conference was unsuccessful, and that "North said the circus would open in Madison Square Garden" in spring 1939.

But the Sarasota *Herald* insisted that "rumors that the show will go out again persist here. *Billboard* reports that according to an existing agreement, the famous old [Barnum & Bailey] title owned by the Ringlings since 1908 [1907] reverts to Barnum heirs if the big show does not operate for 20 weeks in a season. The circus terminated its current season at the end of nine weeks."

Reflecting the city's wariness of the returning circus vagabonds, the *Herald* added: "Chief of Police E. A. Garner left yesterday for

Florence, N.C., where he will board one of the big show trains and return to this city. Purpose of the chief's mission is to study conditions among show workmen in order that the city may judge whether additional police protection will be necessary after return."

The AP reported on July 1 that the circus fleet had returned to Sarasota, minus North, who returned to New York after the Washington confab. Smith indicated that some 50 of the 210 striking employees who had accompanied the two special trains would be retained at winter quarters. He was quoted in the same story that the shutdown "had so demoralized the organization that there is no possibility of resuming the tour this summer. . . .

"McCormick Steel, who said he is the show's personnel manager, declared the circus would not be bothered with strikes on its next tour because 'no union men will be employed.'"

A United Press correspondent joined greeters of the returning trains and filed this report on July 1, which played along with the Ringling subterfuge—in spite of plans being made behind the scenes to put the show back on the road, and with union help: "Like a funeral cortège, silent and forlorn, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus came into winter quarters today and announced it will stay here until the 1939 season rolls around."

"No cheering crowds line railroad tracks as the two trains of 81 cars moved slowly through the town and headed for the quarters, sprawled among the palms and pines three miles east."

"No happy, laughing roustabouts perched atop the gaily painted cars, shouting to friends below. No smiling performers waved from windows as the coaches moved home."

"For the show came home beaten and bedraggled, weakened by a depression, and knocked out by a labor strike."

The June-July 1938 *White Tops* reprinted editorial responses from newspapers across the nation, the *Christian Science Monitor* being among the flummoxed: "What! No Circus? Whoever heard of a circus in winter quarters in the summer? Say it isn't so. . . . Congress has gone home, but couldn't a special session be called? Or the League of Nations? The mirth of a nation is at stake. Human rights of millions of boys—and their fathers, grandfathers and uncles—are in jeopardy. They might get along with bread, but

The 1938 season was one of the worst in American field show history. List from December 1938-January 1939 *White Tops*.

DETAILS OF THE SEASON				
Name	Opened at	Date	Closed	Date
Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey	Madison Square Garden	April 8	Scranton, Pa.	June 22
Cole Bros. Circus	Chicago Stadium	April 15	Bloomington, Ill.	August 3
Robbins Bros. Circus	Kokomo, Ind.	April 30	Decatur, Ala.	October 22
Tim McCoy Wild West	Intl. Amph., Chicago	April 14	Washington, D. C.	May 4
Al. G. Barnes-Sells-Floto Circus	San Diego, Cal.	March 26	Sarasota, Fla.	November 27
Hagenbeck Wallace Circus	Peru, Ind. Truck Shows	April 14	Riverside, Cal.	September 20
Downie Bros. Circus	Macon, Ga.	April 18	Portsmouth, Va.	May 31
Downie Bros. Circus second time	Columbus, Ga.	August 15	St. Augustine, Fla.	November 19
Tom Mix Circus	Texarkana, Tex.	April 12	Pecos, Tex.	September 10
Parker Watts Circus	Emporia, Kans.	April 15	Emporia, Kans.	October 22
Barnett Bros. Circus	York, S. C.	April 7	Great Falls, S. C.	November 12
Russell Bros. Circus	Rolla, Mo.	April 14	Frederickton, Mo.	October 16
Seils Sterling Circus	Aurora, Mo.	April 23	Iron Mountain, Mich.	July 14
Barney Bros. Circus	Anthony, N. M.	March 18		
Haag Bros. Circus		March 23		
Newton Bros. Circus		March 30	Willoughby, O.	August 10
Harris Bros. Circus	Albany, Ky.	April 1	Hanover, Pa.	August 4
Mighty Haag Circus	Marianna, Fla.	April 8		
Eddy Bros. Circus		April 23		
Lewis Bros. Circus	Jackson, Mich.	April 29		
World Bros. Circus				

not without the circus."

The *Grand Rapids Press* chimed in: "The show must go on"—is that, too, one of the things of yesterday that doesn't belong with the modern generation? The Ringling brothers and P. T. Barnum must be turning over in their graves at the thought of it all."

*White Tops* was about to go to press with many angry responses—including that of the governor of Iowa (a Circus Fans Association member)—to the shutdown when the announcement suddenly appeared that featured acts from Ringling Bros. would link up with its Barnes-Sells Floto Circus on July 11 at Redfield, South Dakota.

A last-minute remake of the magazine was necessitated to reveal abrupt changes in the organization's response. As *White Tops* editor W. H. Hohenadel wrote in a companion piece to the listing of Ringling personnel who had joined the Barnes show: "The announcement of the 13th annual convention of the CFA at Madison, Wisconsin on July 31, August 1 and 2 is believed to be the shortest notice in history. The meeting will be held on Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto Combined Circus appearing there on August 2. . . .

"President Hildreth and the Board of Directors urgently request every member who can possibly be there to attend. The slogan carried on the masthead of *White Tops*: 'We fight everything that fights the circus,' coined by Harry Hertzberg will be definitely shown at this meeting."

The CFA's call to action amounted to little more than a rally around the circus flagpole.

Anti-union rhetoric aside, North's decision to link his marquee stars with the Barnes unit was almost heaven-made. Barnes-Sells Floto employees had already agreed, in a union vote at Pocatello, Idaho, to accede to North's demands for a 25 per cent wage cut. The circus musicians union was not subject to the AFA contract.

Despite union picketing at selected stops along the Barnes-Ringling route, circus patrons turned out in droves—albeit in the smaller Barnes tent—right up to the November 27 closing performance at Sarasota. And in spite of AFA president Whitehead's bravado, the union basically marched to North's tune when a new agreement was ironed out at season's end.

On December 17, headlines in *New York Times* proclaimed: "Circus, A.F.L. End Fight At Parley; Ringling Show Will Go On Next Year Under 'Closed Shop' Agreement. Union Is 'Very Happy' New Contract Covering 1,000 Employees Will Be Signed Here Next Week."

This good news merited a single paragraph in the December 1938-January 1939 *White Tops*, buried among a crop of Christmas goodwill ads.

And on March 22, 1939, came this release: "SARASOTA, Fla. (AP)—John Ringling North has announced the Ringling Brothers-Barnum & Bailey Circus, whose 1938 season was cut short by labor trouble, would have its longest itinerary this year, including appearances on the Pacific Coast."

The Greatest Show on Earth also returned to Atlanta on October 21-22, once again offering Terrell Jacobs (but not Mabel Stark), the Cristiani family and, of course, the snarling gorilla Gargantua. As to the Highland Avenue lot that once hosted numerous circuses, Reynolds reported, "The show grounds themselves are now a huge condo, office, apartment and townhouse complex.

"The [Norfolk Southern] belt line along the east side of Atlanta, though not officially abandoned, is nothing but a weed patch (most tracks are still there with some of them paved over at crossings). It has been sold to purchasers who hope to develop a linear park with a streetcar line and condos etc. all along it." **BW**



## WARMEST SEASON'S GREETINGS

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# Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bel Geddes: The Posters and Influence of America's Industrial Designer on The Greatest Show on Earth

By Chris Berry

After the labor troubles of the 1938 season, John Ringling North was convinced that the future success of Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey would be incumbent upon big moves that would get people talking about the circus. The acquisition of Gargantua and the hiring of Frank Buck were bold strokes that got ink for the circus, and for North himself. The world was changing, and North was convinced that in order to maintain the promise of being The Greatest Show on Earth, the circus of the future must be different than a show which had changed little in presentation since the days of Barnum and Forepaugh.

One of the biggest events in the entertainment world in the waning days of the Great Depression was the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940. Over 44 million patrons attended the fair and marveled at its "World of Tomorrow" theme. Although John Ringling North's contribution to the fair, a wild west-themed horse show titled Cavalcade of Centaurs, was widely panned, it was no doubt his involvement at fair which introduced him to the success of designer Norman Bel Geddes and his Futurama exhibit for General Motors.

Bel Geddes was the talk of the fair, and then—as now—he was seen as a pioneer of industrial design. The aerodynamic products produced by Bel Geddes and his team and exhibited at the fair included everything from cocktail shakers to radio cabinets. It was Futurama that gave Bel Geddes and his studio broad acclaim, and shortly after that he was engaged by John Ringling North to redesign the look of the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Fortunately for North, Norman Bel Geddes (1893-1958) had

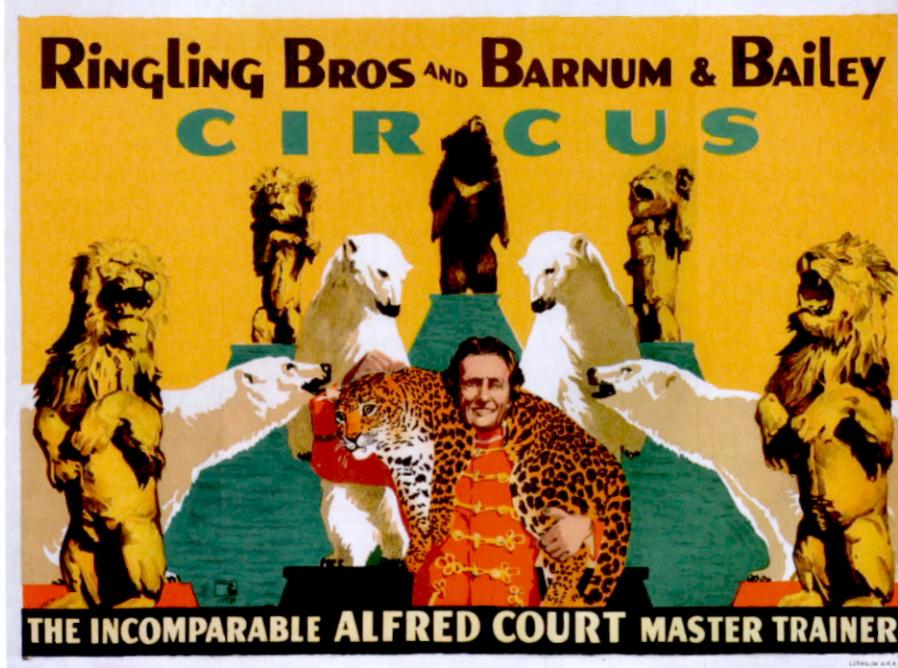
a long history in show business prior to his association with The Greatest Show on Earth. He began designing theatrical sets in Los Angeles as early as 1916. Shortly after he moved east and took on the responsibilities of scenic designer for the New York Metropolitan Opera. He also had experience directing and designing sets for Broadway plays—*Arabesque* (1925) and *The Five O'Clock Girl* (1927)—and in collaboration with world champion ice skater Sonja Henie, he produced one of the first ice shows, entitled *It Happened on Ice* (1940).

Bel Geddes was a true visionary, and after his design studio opened in 1927 he and his team began looking at things from a new and different perspective. In doing so they developed plans for aerodynamic automobiles, streamlined furniture and art deco appliances. When applied to the 1941 edition of the circus, Bel Geddes' out-of-the-box thinking created a bold departure from what audiences had become accustomed to during the years prior to North taking the helm.

New acts were brought to America from war-torn Europe, and tremendous changes were in store for the circus fan, but among the projects that had to be completed before the trains left Sarasota for the opening at Madison Square Garden was the execution of bright new posters which would foreshadow the arrival of the bold new circus of 1941.

## Alfred Court 1941

One of the performers who North had "discovered" in the days prior to World War II was French animal trainer Alfred Court. Although he first appeared with Ringling during the 1940 season, his presentation—so different from that of Clyde Beatty or Terrell Jacobs—was exactly the kind of departure from traditionalism that North and Bel Geddes embraced, and as a result his act was heavily promoted in 1941. The Court poster used that season was one of the first designed and produced at the studios of Bel Geddes. The bold colors and contemporary design were substantially different than the established works of respected lithographers Strobridge and Erie, and if the garish designs were not immediately embraced by traditional circus fans, Alfred Court's act certainly was. This poster represents only a fraction of what Court presented in 1941—an act which featured three rings of simultaneously performing wild animals. In ring one: lions, tigers and bears. In the other end ring: a similar lineup plus jaguars and Great Danes, and in the center ring: a variety of wild felines including leopards,



cougars, pumas, panthers and ocelots.

Although this particular lithograph does not carry any signature other than the modest initials "G.H.," documents uncovered while researching this article confirm that the several posters created in 1941 with the initials "G.H." were actually designed by the prominent architect George Howe (1886-1955), who became a partner of Norman Bel Geddes and Co. in 1941. In fact, one of the Ringling-Barnum circus posters designed by Howe was included in an exhibit entitled *Printed Art—Pictures and Designs that Work* which ran from May 25 until October 18, 1941 at the Brooklyn Museum.

These modern circus poster designs, which can now be attributed to George Howe, have the same feel as those of the highly-regarded poster artist E. McKnight Kauffer, who designed, and signed other lithographs and program covers used by Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey in the 1940s.

#### Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua 1941

Gargantua was a household name and still a tremendous attraction in 1941, yet the acquisition of a female gorilla M'Toto gave the



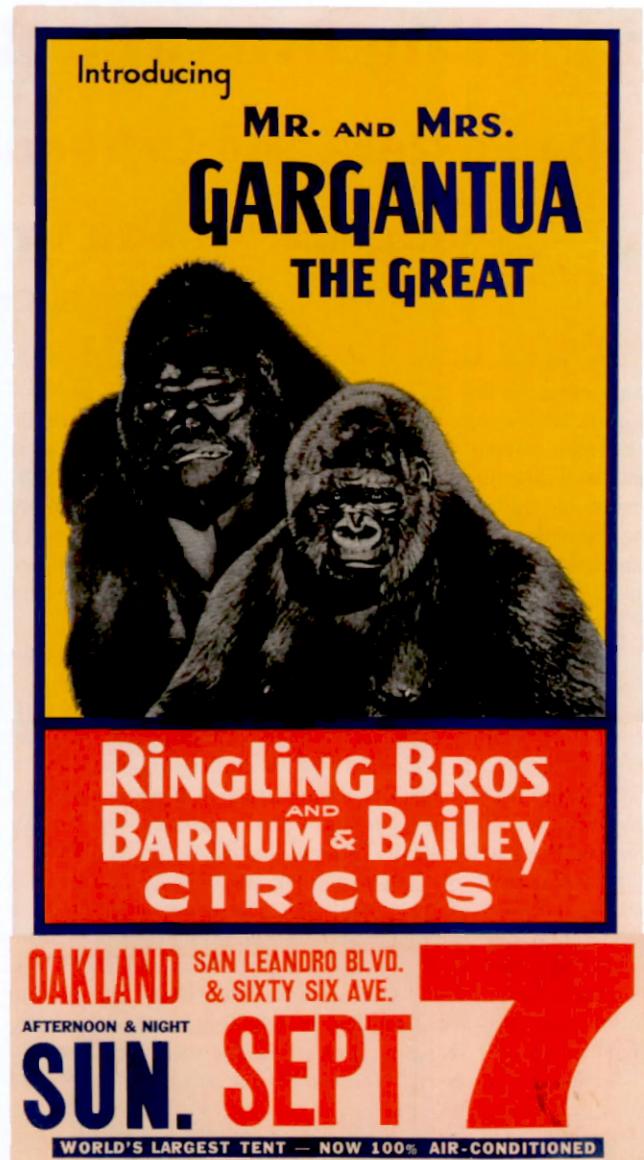
Ringling press office the opportunity to "advance the story" before the opening in New York and promote a primate romance which culminated in a "marriage" of the two apes. During the 1940s three posters depicting Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua were included in the lithographs of billposters and lithographers of Ringling-Barnum, but this poster—again the work of George Howe—is perhaps the most striking and is much different than the classic Gargantua lithographs executed by Strobridge in 1938.

Although this particular lithograph references "For 80 Years, The Greatest Show on Earth," the reference is inexplicably inaccurate. In 1941 it had actually been seventy years since Barnum and his partners first used the famous slogan to promote his show.

#### Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua 1941

The two gorillas were never actually as close as they are seen here, as this poster is a composite photo of the pair, again promoting the addition of M'Toto (Swahili for "Little One") to the show. Not only did the designers at the Bel Geddes studios take some artistic license in putting the couple in this friendly pose, but M'Toto's breasts were also augmented, no doubt in hopes of titillating those who would see the pair staring from the window of a shop or empty store window.

Although John Ringling North had hoped to mate the two gorillas, it never happened. Yet the publicity worked as tens of thou-



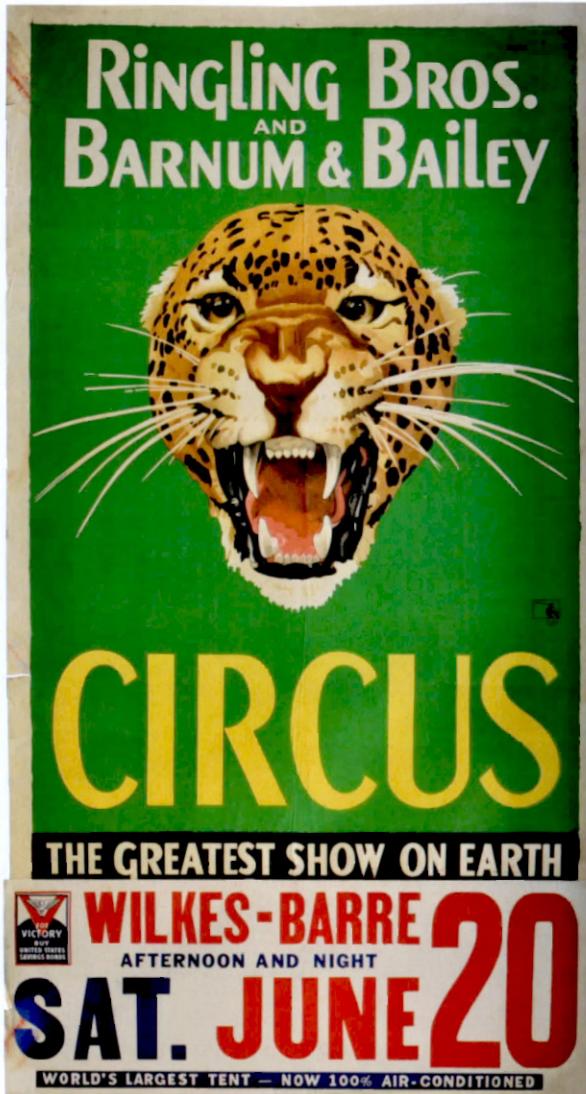
sands flocked to the Bel Geddes-designed gorilla tent, constructed without center poles but rather with four towers which suspended the canvas by cable. Inside the tent were two air-conditioned cage wagons spotted back-to-back that gave easy access in the event that a gorilla romance blossomed during the season-long honeymoon.

Incidentally this particular one-sheet features a date tail for a one-day stand in Oakland, California on September 7, 1941. Exactly three months later the United States was at war, and travel restrictions during the ensuing years kept the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey circus from returning to California until 1948. Oakland didn't see the Big Show again until September 1949, the last time it played that city under canvas and just two months prior to Gargantua succumbing to a case of double-pneumonia.

#### Leopard Head 1941

This poster image surely holds the record for longevity by a circus. Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey used variations of it for nearly thirty years starting in 1941. This example dates from the Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania engagement of June 20, 1942. Note pitch to buy war bonds in upper left corner of date tag.

Over the decades the Ringling-Barnum advance crews posted



window cards, half-sheets, one-sheets and wall work with this striking image of a snarling leopard. The original design (seen here) was among that first group of posters that North commissioned Bel Geddes to produce. Over the years the font changed, the background was temporarily switched from green to red and in 1954 the image of the leopard was sharpened by the artists at Cincinnati's Strobridge Lithograph Company, one of the last posters that the venerable firm printed for Ringling-Barnum. That version, used during the 1954-1956 seasons, is identified by a small printers' union seal in the corner of the poster.

#### Felix Adler 1943

This original design of Felix Adler and his parasol, produced in both upright (vertical) and flat (horizontal) formats, was used throughout the 1940s and into the early 1950s with only slight changes in design-most notably the font used on the title. This one-sheet dates from 1943, a time when North had been replaced at the helm by his cousin Robert Ringling. It promotes an appearance at Hartford's Barbour Street Showgrounds—the same lot where fire would consume the big top less than a year later.

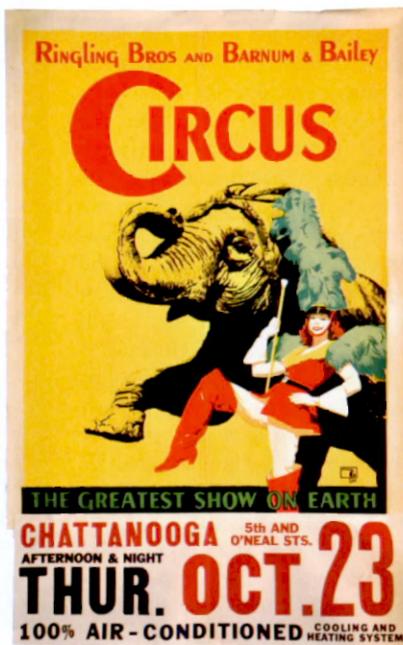
The stamp of designer Norman Bel Geddes was everywhere in 1941, from the bright colors of the midway, a blue big top, a red menagerie tent and even brightly colored sawdust, reddish pink in



rings one and three, white in the middle-and blue on the hippodrome track. While the traditional circus fan might have questioned the changes, the innovations dreamed up by Bel Geddes received rave reviews. The April 26, 1941 *Billboard* said that, "It's the best costumed, best lighted, and best presented circus in the big show's history." Ticket sales went through the roof. During the twenty-eight day stand at Madison Square Garden, fifty-five performances were held and 600,000 patrons paid an average of two-dollars a ticket. Once the show left the Garden audiences continued to flock to the performances, and the influence of Bel Geddes was clear from the moment they set foot on the lot. The sideshow banners had been repainted with a Bel Geddes theme, and in the menagerie paintings of jungle scenes were added between and on the cage wagons. The crowds loved it and showed their appreciation at the ticket wagon. The new big top, made of blue canvas, could seat eleven thousand people and the attendance numbers were staggering. Sixty thousand attended the four shows in Cleveland, Ohio. Detroit's four-day stand brought in seventy-four thousand people, and 120,000 saw the show during the ten-day stand in Los Angeles. According to the December 27 *Billboard*, the 1941 season was "the best ever" at the box office.

#### Kitty Clark and Elephant 1941

This particular design, which also carries the initials of George Howe, continues the Bel Geddes theme of bold colors and was produced in both an upright and flat format. This poster continued to be used—with some minor variations—throughout the 1940s, but this is the original 1941 design with the stylized font, the Bel Geddes studios



logo, and Howe's initials printed between the elephant's hind legs; three elements that disappeared in later renditions of this poster. Howe's modern design was based on a photograph and is the first of three posters that featured the image of Kitty Clark. The other two from 1944 are much more traditional—Bill Bailey's "Panto's Paradise" spec poster and Maxwell Frederic Coplan's photograph of her with a white horse and a pink background. A rehash of this basic design was also used on the Ringling-Barnum souvenir program book of 1964.

### Old King Cole 1941

In retaining Bel Geddes's services, North literally handed him a blank canvas to which to create his magic. In addition to the design of the color scheme of the tents, the posters, menagerie and costumes, he was also told to come up with a spec unlike anything to which circus audiences had become accustomed. For the 1941 season the "spectacular fantasy," titled "Old King Cole and Mother Goose" was moved from the opening act to Display #5, the first time in the show's history that the spec didn't open the performance.

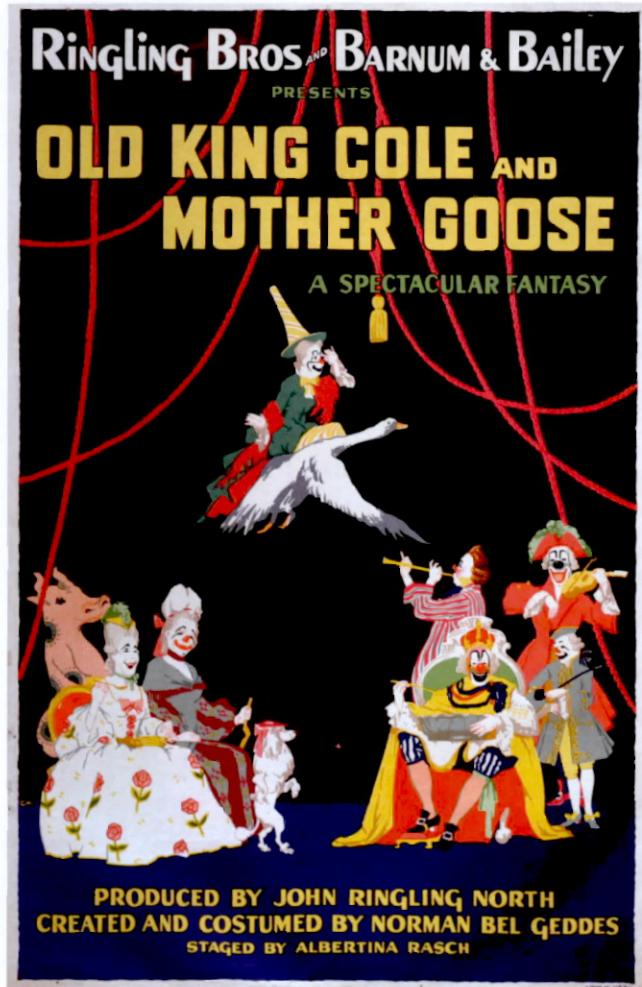
An article by Fred D. Pfening Jr. in the January-February 2004 *Bandwagon* provides notes from a meeting on January 24, 1941 when Bel Geddes and North discussed the spec. The notes read in part, "Everything in the circus should look as if it is happening for the benefit of Old King Cole (clown Lou Jacobs). The Court animal act cannot be part of the King's entertainment, because it is too dominating in itself, a horse spectacle would be the same, as well as any other big arena act, except the elephants and things that have a special quality, or any period act that doesn't fit in with the Mother Goose idea. Therefore, we should start the circus with two or three obviously unrelated acts."

Both an upright and flat version of this poster were printed. This lithograph also carries the initials of George Howe and its dark background punctuated by splashes of color foreshadows the design of the two Bel Geddes posters that were created specifically for the 1942 season by the famed poster artist E. McKnight Kauffer.

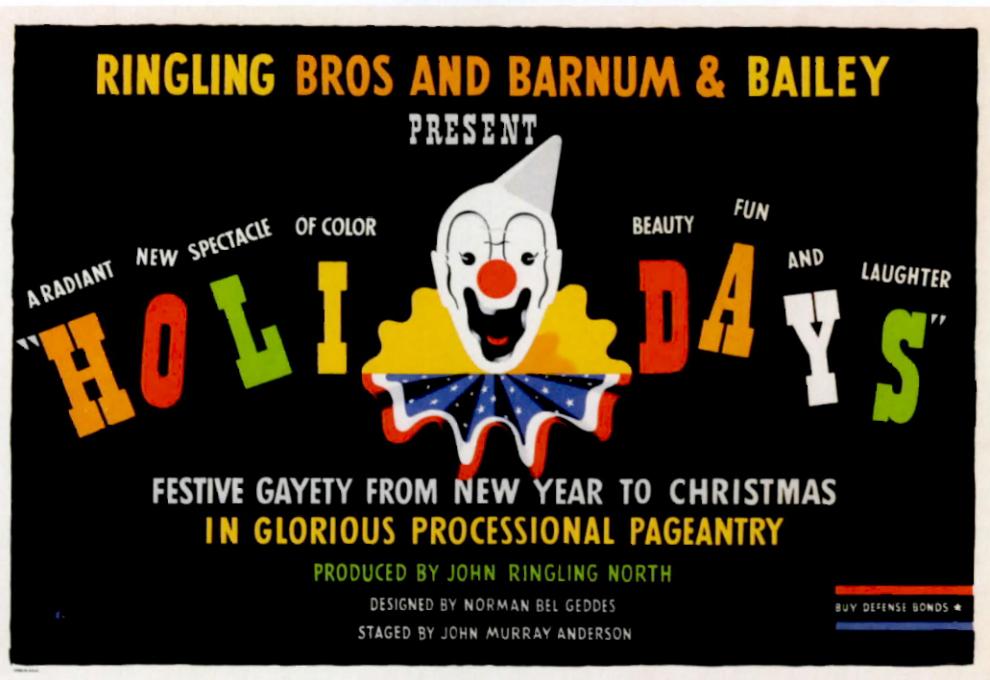
### Holidays 1942

Following his success in 1941, North continued to use Bel Geddes's services in 1942 and hired producer and director John Murray Anderson to help stage the show. That included not only the "Holidays" spec but also the "Elephant Ballet." By the time this litho was put up in 1942, thousands of posters designed at the Bel Geddes Studios had already been displayed across the length and breadth of the United States.

Although all of the posters produced by the Bel Geddes Studios in 1941 were in an *avant garde* style similar to those created by the influential Kauffer, this design from 1942 is the first lithograph for Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey that actually bears his signature. The use of a well-known artist to create a circus poster was



a departure from the mostly anonymous work created over the previous seventy-five years by the firms of Strobridge, Russell-Morgan, Erie, Central Printing, and Illinois Litho.





Avant garde poster artist E. McKnight Kauffer was commissioned by John North and Norman Bel Geddes to create several designs in the 1940s. In addition to the Elephant Ballet and Holidays images for the 1942 season, his work appears on the covers of the Ringling-Barnum program in 1948 and 1949.

him to create this poster for the "Holidays" spec of 1942—produced by John Ringling North, designed by Norman Bel Geddes and staged by John Murray Anderson.

This particular poster—like many of those used during the war years—encourages passersby to "Buy Defense Bonds," a tremendous patriotic campaign endorsed by Ringling-Brnum, Cole Bros and many other shows. A variation of this same artwork was used as the cover of the 1948 Ringling-Barnum souvenir program book. The 1949 program also features artwork signed by Kauffer of a polar bear, perhaps originally designed as a poster that was never executed.

#### Elephant Ballet 1942

This lithograph features artwork by Kauffer and is the final in the series produced by the studios of Norman Bel Geddes and printed by the McCandlish Litho Corp of Philadelphia. When he began creating this artwork Kauffer knew the concept of the "Elephant Ballet," and was able to execute a stark yet attractive design, even though the "ballet" had yet to be performed.

"The Ballet of the Elephants" was written for the 1942 season by classical composer Igor Stravinsky at the request of George Balanchine, America's premiere ballet choreographer. According to the 1942 pro-

Born in Great Falls, Montana, Kauffer (1890-1954) studied at both the Art Institute of Chicago and in Paris where he was influenced by the post-modernism movement. Consequently many of his poster designs are abstract in nature. Described as the "Picasso of advertising design," Kauffer spent most of his career in England where he became one of the most important and prolific poster artists of the 1920s and 1930s.

Kauffer designed hundreds of posters in his career and in 1915 he began producing posters for the London Underground. Over the next 25 years he created 140 classic images for the subway system that have become highly collectible. In 1940, as London was targeted by the Nazi blitz, Kauffer returned to New York, where North and Bel Geddes commissioned

him to create this poster for the "Holidays" spec of 1942—produced by John Ringling North, designed by Norman Bel Geddes and staged by John Murray Anderson.

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gram, the act featured "Fifty Elephants and Fifty Beautiful Girls in an Original Choreographic Tour de Force. Featuring MODOC, premiere ballerina, the Corps de Ballet and Corps des Elephants." If the design of the circus was evolving in the early 1940s, press-agent puffery was as traditional as it was in the days of Barnum. While "Fifty Elephants" is a memorable number and highly promotable, according to elephant boss Walter McClain, there were actually 45 members in the "Corps des Elephants" at the start of the season, a number that was cut to 41 after the tragic menagerie fire in Cleveland killed four of them on August 4, 1942.

While the "elephant ballet" may have been a bit too high-brow for some of the circus-going public, this particular poster is sought-after by collectors because of the Kauffer design and the billing which mentions the collaboration of three superstars in their particular fields: Kauffer, Stravinsky, and Balanchine.

Whether it was the changes in the performance and its advertising, or the recovering post-Depression economy, 1941 and the subsequent war years brought big money to the Ringling organization. In 1943 senior management of the circus changed from the North brothers to the group led by Robert and Edith Ringling. With those changes in leadership some of the "traditional" elements of the circus returned too, not only to the big top but also to the outdoor advertising used to promote the show. Posters bearing the artwork and signatures of Lawson Wood, Bill Bailey and Maxwell Frederic Coplan gradually replaced the *avant garde* style of Bel Geddes, yet the influence that his design had on the circus and its advertising during a period when America was becoming more urban and sophisticated continued throughout the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

It has been said that the only constant is change. That was as true in 1941 as it is today—seventy years after Bel Geddes began his association with the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

From lavish specs and costumes to customized music and coordinated performances the vision of Norman Bel Geddes has, over the decades, become a part of the fabric of The Greatest Show on Earth—and no doubt will continue to influence its performances, design and staging for some time to come. **BW**



# Season's Greetings

From

## Judy and Gary Griffin

and members Caroline Griffin Lettermann family, Greg and Laura Griffin family, Annette Griffin {Page} and Michael Page



# PETE CRISTIANI REMEMBERS PART I

## 1938 Flash Fire on Circus Train Altered Teen's Career Ambitions

By Lane Talburt  
Copyright 2010

Thirteen-year-old Paraito Cristiani simply wanted to ward off the chill of a Georgia autumn night when he struck a lighted match to a portable camp stove in his stateroom on Car 99 in the wee morning hours of November 9, 1938. He and a score of others aboard the *Sarasota* were awaiting the arrival of a locomotive that would haul the circus train from Atlanta to the next engagement in Anniston, Alabama.

In the blink of an eye, white gas that had overflowed the stove's pump ignited, and the youth's lower right leg was engulfed in flames.

So intense was the heat that "my pajamas stuck to my leg," Pete Cristiani recalled decades later.

His screams brought a brother to the rescue and awakened other occupants of the parked coach who dashed, unharmed, through the vestibules to safety as the blaze spread through the sleeper.

In that defining moment, any chance that the youngest son of Ernesto and Emma Cristiani would achieve the ring stature of his nine siblings all but vanished.

Though Atlanta newspapers dutifully reported the fire, Pete's injury remained virtually unpublicized and little known outside his family, until now. Cristiani was reluctant to talk much about the long-ago mishap on a rail siding adjacent to the Highland Avenue show grounds east of downtown Atlanta. In fact, the freakish incident never surfaced during this writer's first, four-hour interview with him in 2000.

Not until Pete's wife, Norma Davenport Cristiani, referred to the Atlanta fire in a 2008 interview at the couple's home in Sarasota, Florida did the retired trouper begin peeling back the complex lay-

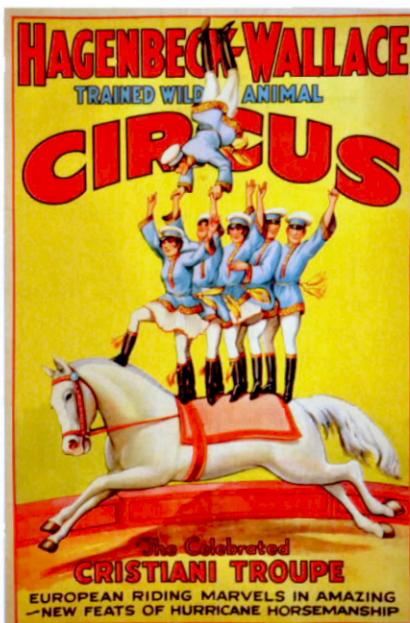
When the Barnes-Floto show played at Atlanta on November 7-8, 1938, Joe Bradbury, then a student at the University of Georgia in Athens, took this photo from the Highland Ave. bridge. The Cristiani coach that caught fire was beneath the bridge. Photo courtesy Richard J. Reynolds III.



ers surrounding the incident. (Mrs. Cristiani died on August 18, 2010, at age 79.)

In his recent conversations, the 85-year-old Cristiani debunked stories circulating among circus folk about the origin of the fire. His revelations also placed into context John Ringling North's stinging admonition of George W. Smith for the general manager's booze-fueled antics amid efforts to put out the coach fire.

The severity of injuries to Pete's leg, which required half a dozen skin grafts and an 18-month healing period, necessitated his reverting to his first love on the circus lot—concessions—in the years after his return to the nomadic and ever-growing troupe. In the 1950s he was the concessions boss and contributed significantly to the coffers of the family-controlled King Bros., King-Cristiani and Cristiani Bros. circuses. The last of the



This one-sheet poster, featuring the Cristianis during the 1938 season with Ringling-Barnum, was designed by Erie Lithograph in Erie, Pennsylvania. Pfening Archives.

Cristiani males fielded his own shows during the 1960s—Wallace Bros., Wallace-Cristiani and, for a brief period, the revived Dailey Bros. title (owned by his father-in-law, the notorious Ben C. Davenport). Cristiani also managed a Lewis Bros. unit for Hoxie Tucker, the Toby Tyler Circus for Dick Garden and was a casino executive in Las Vegas. He also ran concessions stands on two of the nation's largest carnivals in the 1970s and 1980s.

Today, Pete and his younger sister, Coraita (Corky) Cristiani Bowles, are the only surviving members of the ten Cristiani brothers and sisters who comprised what many circus historians have termed the most accomplished equestrian troupe of the 20th century. In birth order, the Cristiani riders were Oscar, Daviso, Lucio, Machaquita (Chita), Belmonte, Cosetta, Mogador (Paul), Hortense (Ortans), Pete and Corky.

Pete and Corky are expected to attend the special evening

honoring their family at the Ringling Circus Museum on Saturday, January 21, 2011. The versatile family previously was inducted into the Circus Ring of Fame and the Circus Hall of Fame.

This story reveals previously unpublished information about the 1938 train fire—specifically its cause and how the inferno impacted Pete's life and career. It also explores his childhood years in Europe prior to the family's arrival in America in 1934 to appear in the center ring of the Greatest Show on Earth and two other Ringling-controlled circuses, Hagenbeck-Wallace and Al. G. Barnes, through the 1943 season.

An accompanying article describes the unique set of circumstances in that Depression era that led the Cristianis to perform on a pieced-together show with an unwieldy title: Al G. Barnes-Sells-Floto Combined Circuses Presenting Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Stupendous New Features.

### Cristiani Coach was Under Bridge

The show's two-day stand in Atlanta on November 7-8 produced no particular surprises, until the blaze in the Cristiani family's car in the afterhours of the well attended four-performance engagement.

From the Cristiani family car, parked under the Highland Avenue Bridge in a row of Ringling sleepers, it was an easy walk for Pete and other family members to the adjacent show grounds.

As circus historian and Atlanta native Richard J. Reynolds III points out, the accompanying photo—taken during the Atlanta stand and looking down from the Highland Avenue bridge over Southern Railway belt line—indicates that the Ringling-Barnum coaches (with silver rooftops) were closest to the lot. Performers on the Barnes-Sells-Floto sleepers (the cars on the far right of the photo) had to walk around the Big One's sleepers to get to the circus back door.

Awaiting the beginning of Southern Railroad switching operations that would take performers and workingmen to the next stop along the final legs of the hyphenated season, many of the Cristianis had retreated to their state-rooms. Pete said he shared one of these with his oldest brother Oscar. Earlier in the season the two were assigned a stateroom in an adjoining car. But that was before a strike by the circus labor union truncated Ringling-Barnum's regular tour at Scranton, Pennsylvania, on June 22.

Alone in the enclosed compartment, the strapping teen changed from his performance costume into his pajamas. Still shivering from the chilly walk—rain and a cold front had moved through the area earlier—from the big top to the Ringling coaches on the siding, Pete decided a fire from the camp stove would warm his flesh and bones.

This would be his last totally pain-free moment for the next year and a half.

As he primed the pump to force fuel into the burner, "I over pumped it," Cristiani recalled. Unaware that white gas was spilling

onto the flooring, Pete struck a match. The resulting flash fire triggered the fuel on the floor and sent flames up his right leg.

Another brother, Lucio, heard Pete's screams. The troupe leader threw open the stateroom door and quickly smothered the fire by throwing his overcoat around Pete's lower body. But not before Pete's leg sustained third-degree burns from the ankle to the knee. The extent of the damage to the limb would not be fully known until daylight hours.

Though thrown into shock and writhing in pain, Pete said he remained conscious and was able to remember much of what followed. He recalled being examined on the scene by Dr. Joseph Berger, the circus physician, who recommended that the youth be rushed to a local hospital.

"I hollered for them not to take me there, because I knew the train would be leaving soon and I didn't want to be left behind."

Cristiani said the doctor applied salve to the open wound, then bandaged it. He gave Pete some pain medication and reluctantly agreed to let the patient accompany his family on the late-night jump.

### Conflicting Fire Stories

In the meantime, "there was a lot of commotion and confusion," Cristiani noted, as circus managers, performers and laborers pitched in to evacuate other occupants from Car 99 and to battle the quickly spreading inferno.

Reynolds reported that James "Tex" Copeland, a veteran utility man on the Barnes and Ringling-Barnum shows, gave him an eyewitness account of the conflagration.

"I had a conversation with [Copeland] in the late 1980s or early 1990s about this matter," Reynolds wrote in an e-mail to the writer on February 17, 2009. "This is what he told me: 'Mama Cristiani was cooking some Italian food on a portable stove. Two of the brothers got into a squabble and were tussling with one another. The stove got overturned and that started the fire. Those on

the outside watching—like Tex—saw the Cristianis throwing mattresses out the windows of the car. Why? Because they were stuffed with money.'"

Actually, Cristiani retorted, no one else was around when he accidentally triggered the blaze in his stateroom. And he insisted that members of the Naitto troupe were the ones throwing money out the coach windows. He noted that the Naittos and Walter and Tamara Heyer occupied separate staterooms at one end of Car 99.

Responding Atlanta firemen were hampered in putting out the blaze due to lack of accessibility and inadequate fire hose length—the Cristiani car was almost 40 feet directly beneath the Highland Avenue viaduct, Cristiani recalled.

### Atlanta Paper Got it Wrong

Behind schedule for a 100-mile jump, the circus train pulled

out of the sidings east of downtown Atlanta as soon as practicable after the fire was extinguished. Given that the incident occurred late at night, it's not likely that local reporters would have been on site. This may partially explain numerous errors in a November 9 story published by the *Atlanta Georgian* under the heading, "Bridge, Animals Periled by Blaze On Circus Train." The garbled account, in which the Cristianis were misidentified and which failed to report the extent of Pete's injuries, is reprinted here: "A spectacular, though unrehearsed after-show was added to the Sells-Floto circus Tuesday night when a gasoline heater exploded in one of the railway cars, routing about 25 sleepy performers and causing an estimated \$6,000 damage.

"The car was occupied by the Catherine Players (sic), featured riding troupe. One woman [presumably Mama Cristiani] fainted and a 17-year old youth [Pete was actually 13] was slightly burned. He was treated by the circus doctor.

"Flames from the car at first threatened the Highland Avenue bridge, and it was feared that the many valuable circus animals might be injured, but city firemen and circus employees, the latter clad in night clothing, brought the blaze under control after half an hour. . . .

"The interior of the car was destroyed, along with the personal effects of its occupants. The fire delayed moving of the train until another coach could be obtained, but officials declared that the show will exhibit on schedule in Anniston, Ala."

A day-after story in the *Atlanta Journal* added that even though the family car's interior had been charred by the blaze, the sleeper left with the Alabama-bound show train. Cristiani remembered the family car was uncoupled from the middle and relocated to the end of the line of coaches.

Reynolds noted that the coach was repaired and saw service in subsequent years on Ringling-Barnum. But, he added, "Show policy likely forbade portable stoves in those old cars because of the fire hazard, and this event proved the wisdom of this policy."

#### North Rebukes Smith

At some point John North became aware of



The Cristianis, Gargantua, and the air-conditioned big top shared this billboard at 4550 West Washington Street for the 1939 Chicago lakefront stand. Paul Rice photo, Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

the serious nature of the Cristiani boy's burns. In his private coach, North dictated a "Dear George" letter "en route" on a Barnes-Sells-Floto letterhead to his beleaguered general manager. Obviously seething, North chastised Smith in the November 9 epistle for his drunken behavior at the fire scene.

"Last night, while people's clothes were burning and circus property was being destroyed, you stood outside the [Cristiani] circus car and made wise cracks. . . .

"I make this suggestion to you for your own good, and for the good of the organization: that you start drinking only two highballs a day or go back to those two [C]oca [C]olas which you were drinking last winter in Sarasota."

Pointing to the fact that he had promoted Smith to the top operational spot after the death of the well-liked Carl T. Hathaway some ten months earlier, the frustrated chief executive added: "The manager of the circus should be admired and respected at all times."

(See the two-part article, "The Ups and Downs of George Washington Smith" by Robert J. Loeffler in the July-August and September-October 2005 *Bandwagon*. Smith would take that advice to heart a decade later when he was asked to fill in for the ailing Ben Davenport as general manager of Dailey Bros.)

#### "Bones in my Leg were Exposed"

To the meteoric North, the fire aboard Coach 99 was one of many problems to be confronted and resolved on a daily basis.

But Pete Cristiani's agony was just beginning. He was taken to an Anniston hospital for further examination. When the attending physician peeled back the grossly stained bandage from the young patient's wound, "the bones in my leg were exposed."

Cristiani was driven to Sarasota where he was immediately admitted to Houlton Hospital. Not long thereafter, his treatment was complicated by a bone infection—osteomyelitis. For a brief period, he recalled, the infection became so severe that doctors came close to amputating his right leg. To ward off further infection during the 2½-month ordeal, nurses repeatedly soaked Pete's leg in "warm

# Fratelli Cristiani

May 4th 1938 193

Noel Van Tilburg  
Shrine Circus  
Minneapolis, Minn

Dear Mr. Van Tilburg:

How's everything getting along. I am sure fine, so is all the family. Also the business of the show, it is great.

Mr Mills of London will visit the Ringling the latter part of June to talk over business for the Christmas season in London, Olympia.

Intervening I would like to know who makes the business for your Indoor dates. The date would fall just right for our return from England. So please Mr. Van Tilburg let me know if you would have interest in us. In this way it will be easier for me to handle the business.

Best regards to all of you.

Most Sincerely,  
Oscar Cristiani

Permanent Address: CORSO UMBERTO I. N. 17 - MODENA ITALY

Oscar Cristiani wrote Noel Van Tilburg, the Minneapolis-based Shrine Circus producer, about lining up winter dates in early 1939. Written while Ringling-Barnum was appearing in the Boston Gardens, Cristiani noted that business was "great." Pfening Archives.

water and Epsom salts." Repairing the gaping wound required a series of six skin grafts.

In the meantime, his family continued performing twice daily for the remainder of the tour, which ended with shows at Sarasota on November 27. Almost immediately they departed for a previously contracted six-week engagement on the Bertram Mills circus in England where British audiences also saw Gargantua for the first time.

Papa Cristiani had leased a house for the family in Sarasota, establishing the community as their permanent home base. While the Cristianis were overseas and afterward fulfilling winter dates stateside, Pete and Corky—she was left behind to keep her brother company—were taken in by the Oscar Cannestrelli family.

When the Ringling-Barnum train pulled out of Sarasota for the 1939 season opener at Madison Square Garden on April 5, Pete was unable to join his family. Not until the circus was under canvas in Washington, D. C. in mid-May did he link up with his parents and siblings. Even then, however, he was on crutches.

That the youth was able to return to the Cristiani family routines was somewhat of a miracle in itself. "The most important muscles for the Cristianis," emphasized author Richard Hubler in his 1966 book, *The Cristianis*, "are the ones in the legs. The supple development of thigh and calf has always been a necessity in their specialties....

"They must have an apparently inexhaustible ability to somersault and pirouette around a ring, to bounce from the back of one horse to another in intricate combinations of passing bodies. . . . Speed is another essential relating to distance and height in jumping."

### Showgirl Noticed Pete's Burns

Gradually, Pete was able to resume his place in several acts. He

was an understander in the human totem pole in which Orta was hurled from a teeterboard to the top of the formation. He also joined his brothers in the famous four-person split and five-person jump to horseback.

By 1942, after the outbreak of World War II, when Connie Clausen was a first-of-May showgirl on Ringling-Barnum, Paraito apparently was performing daily as if nothing had ever happened. Miss Clausen, who was the subject of Pete's flirtations for much of that tour, wrote about the relatively short-lived affair in her 1961 book, *I Love You Honey, But the Season's Over*.

Referring to Belmonte Cristiani being "in the Army and due to visit the circus on his next leave," she offhandedly mentioned, "Paraito had been rejected, so far, because of his leg, which had been badly burned in a circus-train fire five years before."

Pete did later serve in the armed forces, however. Following basic training he was transferred to Hollywood to support the war effort in a rather obscure setting, as a later article in the series will reveal.

Norma Cristiani remembered seeing her future husband performing for the first time on King Bros in 1949; Pete was one of the Cristianis leaping over elephants. The couple was married in 1950.

Pete's parents had intended him to be a wire walker, adding to the individual routines performed and perfected by other family members.

Like his older brothers and sisters, the last of the Cristiani sons was born on a circus lot.

With the assistance of a midwife, Emma Cristiani delivered Paraito on June 24, 1925, in the family's 30-foot wagon at Parma, Italy. Given his father's affinity for bullfighting, Paraito—and brother Belmonte—were the namesakes of Spanish toreros. His father had selected a park in Parma frequented by other traveling circuses and carnivals for a simple reason—there were no lot and license requirements. In fact, the site was free of all costs.

### Pete's Non-Riding Ring Debut

"I remember some things about my dad's circus," Pete said. With a brother, Ernesto Cristiani had launched his first circus in 1919, touring mostly in Northern Italy but ranging as far south as Naples. "It was the largest circus in Italy at the time. World War I was a depressed time for entertainment in general. But after that it was pretty good. And as I remember my father and others talking about it, the high times were before [World War I].

"But my clearest memories were when we left there and went to France" in 1931.

During the late 1920s the family had become increasingly wary of the meteoric rise of Benito Mussolini and his Fascist party. But the elder Cristiani's decision to leave his homeland in 1931 may have been motivated less by the dictator's repressive actions and more by sheer economics.

Mussolini had instituted a law mandating businesses to return 80 per of their profits to the government.

"My dad couldn't see paying that amount, leaving him only 20 percent," Cristiani said. So Ernesto made a deal with Cirque Medrano, on which he had previously performed, to deliver his entire show—including an elephant and horses but *sans* canvas, to Paris.

"We were there for over a year in this one building," Cristiani recalled. Though he was still too young to perform with his own family, Pete was impressed by the stellar lineup of performers on that show. "The Great Rastelli [Enrico Rastelli]—there's no doubt

that he was the greatest juggler that ever lived. And there was Charlie Rivel, who was one of the most famous comedians in Europe."

It was not the Cristianis but Rivel who gave young Paraito the opportunity to debut as a performer when he was either six or seven years old. The comedy routine featured Rivel and two of his brothers, who built a human bridge which Paraito and three of Rivel's sons were supposed to mimic.

"Rivel would jump around the ring, and we would follow him doing the same thing. But we were just a bunch of kids. I didn't

think it was very funny, but apparently the audience did."

Pete recalled that when the Rivelos moved on after a three-month stint on Cirque Medrano, Charlie's wife told young Cristiani that she wanted to give him a farewell gift for his helping out in the ring. She asked him what he wanted. Turning to Mama Cristiani for advice, he was instructed to "ask for money." The six-year-old returned to Mrs. Rivel and, using the French vocabulary he had accumulated, told her "l'argent" (money) would be a proper tribute.

Half-sheet poster, designed by Erie Lithograph for the Cristianis on the 1934 Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Pfening Archives.

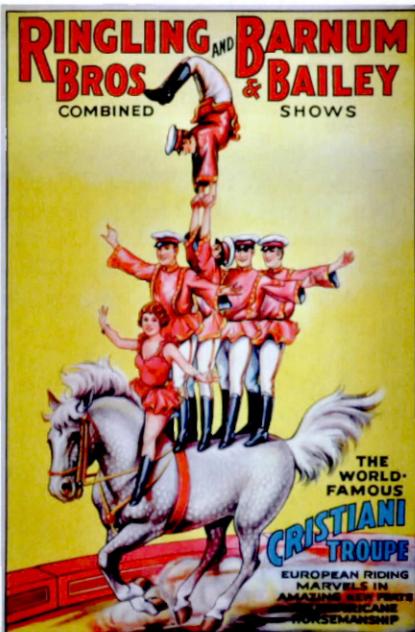
Pete was a natural for the comedy routine. He had been developing tumbling skills under the tutelage of his father and oldest brother, Oscar. (Tumbling had been Papa Cristiani's forte during his European performing career.) Pete's circus education also included ballet lessons—a requirement thrust on all the Cristiani children—that were intended to improve his wire walking and riding skills.

Lucio and Belmonte, being the primary leapers, garnered the premium share of the family's allotted rehearsal period so the duo could continue perfecting their precision routines. "But when practice time came, we all got our turn at learning how to ride a horse and so forth," Cristiani recalled.

"I believe John Ringling saw my family work at Cirque Medrano in '32," Pete noted. Ringling was booted out of management by one brother's widow and another's daughter-in-law.

#### Contract Talks for America

Ringling dispatched Clifford C. Fisher, one of his European talent scouts who produced Follies Bergere in New York, to negotiate a contract with Papa Cristiani to bring the troupe to America. However, the family already had commitments to fill on the continent and in Great Britain and declined the offer. Ringling-Barnum did sign the Loyal-Repenski troupe to perform on the show in 1932. The Repenskis had two full seasons under their belt on the Big One by the time the Cristianis showed up in Madison Square Garden at the start of the 1934 season.



"When we finished [Medrano in Paris]," Pete explained, "we went to Circus Krone in Germany, then to [Cirque d'Hiver] Bouglione in Belgium, and from there we went to England until the holidays of late '33." Following lengthy indoor engagements in Great Yarmouth and at Glasgow, Scotland, the family returned to the English seaside resort in early 1934.

That's when Ringling personnel director Pat Valdo traveled to Great Yarmouth to square a deal with the leader of the Cristiani clan for the 1934 Ringling-Barnum season. Pete said his father insisted on the riding act being featured alone in center ring but that he compromised by accepting the solo spot at Madison Square Garden and then transferring to Hagenbeck-Wallace where the family would be a featured act.

Ironically, the financially-overextended John Ringling had no say-so in the final contract, having been forced to give up control of the Ringling titles to Sam Gumpertz in mid-1932. In fact, as David Lewis Hammarstrom pointed out in his 1992 book, *Big Top Boss: John Ringling North and the Circus*, Ringling had received a telegram from Gumpertz as the Ringling family circus patriarch was attempting to bring the Cristianis to America. "It warned him," wrote Hammarstrom, "that if he did not quit taking part in such talks—indeed from involving himself in the operations of the circus—we will hold a stockholders meeting and turn you out."

The Cristianis remained a key staple on Ringling organization shows for the next nine years, from 1934 through 1943.

In early March 1934 the Cristianis with the dwarf Bagonghi, a long-time family fixture; their groom, Frachini; and their prized horses set sail out of Portsmouth on the French liner *Champlain* for their maiden voyage to America. Pete laughed as he told of his mother's shrieks as the passengers were being summoned to board a ferry at the docks of the English port. "I'm not going to take that thing to America," Mama Cristiani protested. She relented when Pete's brothers explained that it was necessary for passengers to be ferried to the ocean liner some twelve miles out because the water in the ship channel was too shallow to accommodate larger ships.

Also on the ship's passenger manifest were several other Ringling-bound acts, including the Flying Otaris, noted Cristiani.

At the end of the eight-day journey, the Cristianis cleared immigration at Ellis Island and were chauffeured to a leased apartment some five blocks from the legendary performance venue at 50th Street and 8th Avenue. As Pete recalled, the family had five days to practice its routine before its American debut at the Garden on March 30.

Pete said he and Corky watched the family act from the sidelines. In an interview with the writer on April 15, 2000, Corky recalled the distractions of opening night at the Garden: "In the first place, they [the family] were shocked when they came in, and there were candy butchers screaming and selling balloons or cotton candy. Because in Europe, there is no such thing; nothing is sold while anybody is performing. It's quiet, and everybody works in the center ring—there's only one ring."

After overcoming the initial confusion of working simultaneously with two other riding troupes—including the Loyal-Repenskis, the Cristianis and their horses settled into the new routine. Groused Pete: "We weren't used to that three-ring business, but we went along with it." The two youngest Cristianis watched the action from the sidelines. They would get their chance later to perform with the family.

#### Cristianis on Bill with Beatty

On completing the month-long New York run, Pete recalled, the Cristianis boarded a train with several other Ringling-Barnum acts

to link up with Hagenbeck-Wallace for its two-week indoor opener at the Chicago Stadium on May 6.

As promised, the Cristianis did get the center ring to themselves and their own private coach. Bagonghi slept in the single men's car, and Frachini bunked with other grooms in the horse car. Hagenbeck-Wallace's route introduced the Cristianis to audiences in the Midwest, the East and South.

Pete and Corky made their formal debut with the family on the smaller rail show. Attired in page-boy uniforms, the diminutive duo was tasked with leading the procession of unmounted riders dressed in dazzling Prussian-style outfits and their white horses into the center ring. The youngsters also collected their older brothers' and sisters' hats when the riders initiated the face-paced, precision routine.

In addition to the Cristiani family, the Great Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus featured Clyde Beatty's wild animal act, the Flying Codonas, featuring Alfredo; and, from India, Bombayo on bounding rope.

Circus publicity hyped a daily "two-mile-long street parade at 11 a. m. . . . the first real old-fashioned circus parade since 1926." Though the Cristianis were exempt from that pre-show activity,



The Cristiani bareback riding act was one of the best ever. Left to right in the air are Lucio, Belmonte, and Paul. Photo taken in March 1937 in Hollywood while the family was on the Al. G. Barnes Circus. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

Pete said he remembers Oscar—"he was a great trumpet player"—being paid extra to fill out the ranks of musicians required for the two bandwagons used in the street procession.

After closing their first American season in Memphis, Tennessee, on November 12, the family rode the train to winter quarters in Peru, Indiana, where Ernesto rented a large house from "Laughing George" Davis, the head cook on the show.

One particular outing, an experience shared among many highly impressionable children, stuck in Pete's mind. "I remember my sister Ortans and I walking four blocks downtown on a Saturday afternoon to see a Boris Karloff [horror] movie—it cost us 15 cents each. We are walking home in the dark, and the street lights, which hung from wires, were swaying in the wind. We were scared to death," he chuckled.

The Cristianis repeated with Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1935, opening April 20 at Chicago Stadium and closing on November 4 in Paris, Texas. However, the title of the show was expanded that season to Hagenbeck-Wallace and Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Combined Circus.

After the closing, the Cristianis and their horses entrained to the Baldwin Park, California, winter quarters of the Al G. Barnes Circus. Papa Cristiani rented a house in nearby El Monte. The family

soloed in center ring on the Barnes railer throughout the 1936 and 1937 seasons. New geography awaited the family along the show's meandering route through California and other western states. The show opened both seasons in late March at San Diego and competed both tours in Phoenix, Arizona.

Among the featured performers were famed tiger trainer Mabel Stark and, as an added attraction on the 1937 tour, low-wire artist Hal Silvers, who later changed his name to Hubert Castle.

#### Selling Fluff on Al G. Barnes

Since Pete's role in the family routines was fairly limited, he found himself with a lot of free time. He found a way to fill it, and in the process discovered that he liked being in the circus front yard just as much as under the big top.

"On the Barnes show, I got a job in concessions. I was always hanging around the concessions stand in the menagerie tent," through which all ticketholders had to pass to get into the big show. Within a month or so after the Barnes show opened the 1937 tour on March 21, concessions manager W. E. "Willis" Lawson offered the lad a job paying \$2 a day selling peanuts, Coca Colas, popcorn and cotton candy during the come-in and blow-off.

"The menagerie stand was right in the middle of the tent," Cristiani explained. "It had four corners, with one man at each corner." Another concessionaire in the center of the stand made change and did the count.

In less than a week after he started hustling townies from behind Lawson's stand, Pete picked up the "dirty part" of concessions. Alex Duncan, who had the novelty stand in the menagerie, told the impressionable kid that "you're over there working for Lawson and making \$2 a day when you could be making \$2.50 or \$3."

The secret to new-found wealth was simple, Duncan explained: If Pete took in 50 cents for five bags of peanuts, he should pocket 10 cents in the transaction. "I was making a dime here and there, but I didn't say anything to my parents. I was afraid to tell my mother," Cristiani mused.

"After seven or eight days of this, Lawson caught up with me. I must have had six dollars in change in my pockets. He picked me up by the seat of my pants, turned me upside down, and all the change came down to the ground.

"So I got fired," he chuckled.

"Two days later, he brought me back and told me not to do that again."

His job lasted the one season, but took away valuable lessons that later served him well. "I handled money; I learned the value of money." Most of all, he developed a keen awareness that "the shows couldn't survive without that concession money."

Meanwhile, as several of Pete's older brothers married, the family was able to offer a greater variety of crowd-pleasing acts. Daviso's wife Louise added depth and an aerial dimension in 1937 with her death-defying no-net trapeze routine, and by doing handstands atop a perch pole balanced on her husband's shoulders. "Since she was a trapeze artist—one of the best, it was easy for her to adapt to the perch pole act," Cristiani said.

In 1937, as circus fan Harry Simpson penned in the 1958 Cristiani Bros. route book, "Lucio was featured with the riding act. [His signature trick was a backward somersault from one cantering horse over another and onto a third.] This year they introduced the double teeterboard to chair catch with the chair being balanced on a pole. Cossetta, Chita and Belmonte were doing a principal equestrian act in all three rings and the family also used a Risley act featuring Lucio."

Lucio, considered then and now one of the greatest equestrian

performers in the modern-day circus, had been given "power of attorney and irrevocable appointment" as troupe manager on July 29, 1935. The document, notarized in Syracuse, New York, bore the signatures of Lucio, his parents and his siblings who had obtained legal age. Belmonte and Cossetta were listed as "infants over the age of 14" with Papa as their natural guardian. Pete and Corky were not mentioned in the agreement.

Although Pete had not yet developed his own unique riding trick, he was learning another performing skill—wire walking—which he had anticipated adding to the family's repertoire. Among his teachers, he recalled, were Herbie Weber and another performer whom he simply knew as "Massimo."

Like many veteran kinkers born into the business, Pete shared fond memories of growing up on the Hagenbeck-Wallace and Barnes shows. "I really enjoyed the circus and the people, not only my family but the other people that were on the show. We looked after each other pretty well."

Recalling life as a pre-teen on the Hagenbeck and Barnes railers, Cristiani mused, "It was a lot of fun. There was something new every day."

Among the occupants in the Cristiani car were Papa and Mama; Oscar and Marion—they were married only months into the 1937 tour; Daviso and Louise, and the eight other Cristiani siblings.

"My married brothers had a stateroom, and all of us kids had our own bunks. And we all used to eat in our dining room. And in the morning [after the circus train arrived], everybody got up on their own time, had a snack and go to the lot.

"I used to get up in the morning and watch them unload [the train]. I'd get a ride on one of the trucks to the show grounds. By the time I got to the show grounds, the cook tent was always open for breakfast."

Asked if he was a trouble-maker on the lot, Pete responded, "No. I got into a couple of mischiefs. But my brothers were all older—they were all grown. There were a lot of other kids on the show. We'd play soccer together and different other games on the lot when we weren't practicing or weren't in the show."

"And during the summer between shows, we usually went swimming somewhere. The circus bus used to take a load of kids to the swimming pool or park, depending on what part of the country we were in at that time."

Although the Cristianis had been spotted in Europe by John Ringling, they actually performed in the United States during Sam Gumpertz's stint as manager. Because of Papa Cristiani's insistence that the troupe be featured in the center ring without competition

on either side, it had not performed on Ringling-Bernum since its month-long debut in New York in 1934.

### Bound for Big Bertha

That changed with the abrupt takeover of the Ringling properties by John Ringling North in December 1937.

By that time the Cristiani family had ascended to the top rung of American circus aristocracy, thanks in no small part to their exposure to the Hollywood scene during their two years on the Barnes show. In 1937 the Cristiani riding act, featuring Lucio with his unparalleled twisting somersault from one horse to another, were filmed for a Pete Smith short being shown in movie theaters across America.

Plus, they had grown accustomed to having their images plastered on billboards and posters throughout from coast to coast as arenic stars on the Hagenbeck-Wallace and Barnes circuses.

Ernesto Cristiani had an ace up his sleeve when Pat Valdo was once again dispatched to negotiate the family's return to the Greatest Show on Earth for the 1938 season. The troupe had been contracted to perform at Shrine circuses through the Midwest, and producers such as Frank Wirth, Orrin Davenport, and George Hamid and Robert Morton wanted the family's services on a year-round basis.

Valdo did not approach the task of signing the Cristianis with much enthusiasm, Pete said. "Pat was a nice guy, but he already had three riding troupes [including the Loyal-Repenskis] on Ringling."

Cristiani recalled that when the affable personnel director returned to Sarasota empty handed from the initial talks, "North got all over Valdo's ass....

"John Ringling North had to have our family. He wanted the best."

"But my dad was a pretty shrewd businessman; he was tough." In addition to securing the coveted, non-compete center ring spot, a private car and cook tent privileges, "my dad wound up getting \$1,800 a week, the biggest money ever paid for a troupe," Pete said.

The Cristianis were not the only featured act being trumpeted by the 34-year-old North. Joining the 1938 tour on America's most prestigious circus meant that the family would have to compete for the attention of audiences with the likes of three other Ringling-Barnum newcomers: Frank "Bring 'em Back Alive" Buck, wild animal trainer Terrell Jacobs and the much ballyhooed Gargantua.

North's decision not to honor a new labor agreement signed in 1937 by Gumpertz threw the traditional Madison Square Garden opening into turmoil, with circus workers refusing to cross union picket lines outside the building, forcing rival equestrian families



The Cristiani troupe posed for this publicity photo in the mid-1930s. Standing, l. to r., Belmonte, Oscar Paul, June, Cossetta, Chita, Papa Ernesto, Lucio, and Daviso. Sitting, l. to r. Corky, Ortans, and Pete. Pfening Archives.

to assist each other in their respective routines.

### Cristiani Disputes Families' "Feud"

In the April-May 1938 *White Tops*, George Brinton Beal documented what he termed "the strangest circus performance on record in the history of Madison Square Garden."

Without the back-up services of the striking workers, "the spec went in on foot, minus horses and elephants," Beal reported. "Frank Buck walked, his elephant missing. He got a cheer for that from the crowd which suddenly realized that something decidedly different from the scheduled performance was taking place. . . .

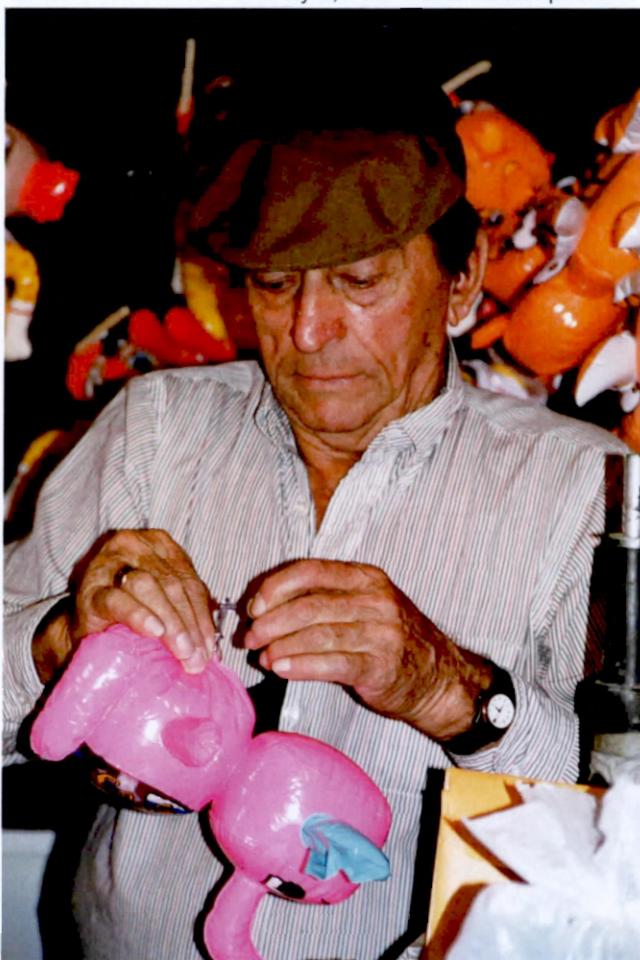
"The performers worked as property men and riggers in bathrobes, drawn hastily over their costumes. But they worked. And the show went on.

"The Loyal-Repenski Family groomed for the Cristiani Troupe, healing a feud between two great riding acts of generations." Despite the fact that the incumbent Loyal-Repenskis basically played second fiddle to the newcomers, Pete downplayed tales of the feuding families. He pointed out that his mother and the Repenski troupe's matriarch had been childhood friends, that the Papa Ernesto had hired the Repenskis to perform on his circus in Italy, and that Cristiani brothers Oscar and Daviso had dated daughters of the Repenskis on that show.

"Justino Loyal was a great rider; we were good friends," Cristiani said. "We respected their riding."

During the two-day strike by 300-500 disaffected workers,

The old master. Pete Cristiani working concessions on Circus Sarasota on February 5, 2002. Lane Talburt photo.



"there was a great deal of cooperation among performers," he emphasized. "Everybody was mad at the union for breaking up the show. Everybody stuck together. John Ringling North was very close to the show, very well liked."

Despite the continuing labor strife that plagued the Big One after the New York and Boston stands, Pete was able to enjoy his increased responsibilities in the riding and tumbling routines as well as his transition from boyhood into the teen years.

Whether indoors or under the big top, "we worked in a combination. I don't know whether you've seen the family act at all," he told the writer, who witnessed the Cristianis in an open-air performance in his hometown in 1954. "But everybody participated in different tricks. [The brothers] jumped on the horse together, shimmied down [in a fork maneuver], standing up together. It was more or less not an individual performance."

However, "Lucio worked individually; Belmonte worked individually. Lucio, Belmonte and Paul did triple back flips [off their mounts to the ground]. And when one particular brother wasn't doing a trick, he would hold the whip, and when we all jumped on the horse together, one of my sisters would hold the whip."

The Cristiani women demonstrated their well honed talents as principal riders and in the dressage act in which Daviso particularly excelled. Chita was best known for her ballet on horseback—a routine performed years later by Corky. Ortans dazzled audiences when she became the first woman circus performer to do a triple backward somersault from the teeterboard to the top of three brothers standing feet to shoulders.

From the outset Pete noticed the differences, not only in relationships among performers on the bigger show but also in sleeping arrangements on the train. A sleeping car layout drawing by George Smith shows that the "Cristiani boys," Pete and Oscar were assigned to bunks in a car adjacent to the family coach.

"Ringling had such a vast amount of people," Cristiani recalled. "It was a different type of show altogether. It wasn't quite so family oriented. There was a lot more families there, but you didn't reach out to people like you did around the smaller shows. I had a good time on the Ringling show, but the people on the smaller shows were closer knit."

When the union struck Big Bertha on June 22 in Scranton, Pennsylvania, North refused to cave in to workers' demands and sent the Ringling-Barnum train back to winter quarters. It was a brief respite. The Cristianis were aboard the special unit of 20-plus cars that left Sarasota to join the newly constituted Barnes-Sells-Floto circus featuring acts from Ringling-Barnum, which gave its first performances in Redfield, South Dakota, on July 11.

However, Reynolds pointed out that, according to the revised Barnes-Floto program, the Cristianis no longer had the spotlight to themselves in the reshuffled lineup, but were flanked in Display 8 by two other equestrian acts—the Mitzi-Rose Sisters in Ring 1 and Bettina and James in Ring 3. Cristiani said he does not remember the family appearing in the ring with the two other acts.

When the blaze broke out in the family car in Atlanta on November 9 as the tour was nearing its end, the resulting injury to Pete's leg almost spelled the end of his performing. Though his healing wounds hampered his return to the ring in 1939, Cristiani overcame the difficulties to continue what would be a lengthy and notable career on the tanbark trail.

Next: Pete Cristiani remembers the Ringling years, and his post-World War II stints on Russell Bros.-Pan Pacific, Cole Bros. and Dailey Bros. Circuses, and his devoting full attention to concessions during the 1950s in family ventures with Floyd King, Bob Stevens and on the highly acclaimed Cristiani Bros. Circus. **BW**

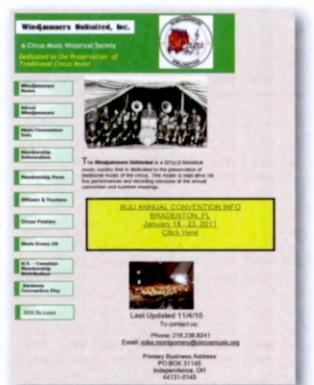
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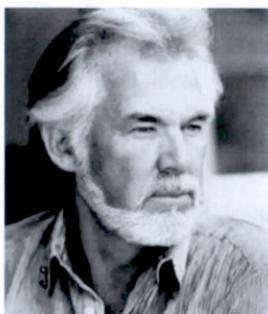
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# More Tales From the Trenches

By Mike Straka

## "CAN YOU HELP KENNY OUT?"

I spent a good number of years promoting Kenny Rogers. I was given six dates to fill for Kenny's Christmas tour. Five of the dates got an immediate approval from C. K. Spurlock, Kenny's main promoter-manager. The sixth date I submitted was Olean, New York. In fact, I wanted to put Kenny at St. Bonaventure University. The university had a 6000 seat gym. I argued my case that the location was rural and had great numbers of country listeners. Nothing like this had ever been in Olean. (Remember this is the home of circus star Billy Martin.) Finally, everyone signed off with the understanding that my butt would be on the line for this date.



Singer Kenny Rogers.  
Internet image.

As it all turned out, we sold over 6000 tickets to the show. I was vindicated and made Kenny some serious money. This is the jumping off point for this story.

Two years later, I received a call from Kenny's people. They asked if I wanted to go up to Olean and set the ads for a repeat performance. I told them that this was a bad idea. I was told not to worry, Kenny would pack 'em in.

I set the deals with the newspapers, radio and TV stations. On the day of the show, my wife Roberta and I headed up to St. Bonaventure. I submitted all my paperwork to Kenny's people. My deal was to be reimbursed for all the ads and receive a \$1,500 commission. Right from the start, everyone was hostile. Obviously, I must have done something wrong; they hadn't sold 6000 tickets. I reminded them that I had predicted that this would be a bad decision.

By show time, I had managed to get my check for the ads, but the show accountant told me I could forget about my check for \$1,500. I quietly turned and walked away. Sometimes it pays to scream and shout and other times a diplomatic approach is best. Kenny wasn't the only show I had presented at St. Bonaventure. In fact I had a very glowing letter from the President of the University thanking me for all my wonderful work. I decided it was time to call in this marker.

I waited outside the office as Kenny's people went inside to settle the box office. The student activities director turned to the road manager and informed him that NO money would be turned over to them until I was paid. At this point, I was called into the settlement. With little choice, the road manager looked at me and said, "It's been a bad day here, how about \$750? Can you help Kenny out?"

I burst out laughing, help him out. How about helping me out. His horse stables were nicer than my house. I left the meeting with my check for \$1,500.

What Kenny's people didn't know was that St. Bonaventure is run by Franciscan monks. Their sense of right and wrong is not the same as that of promoters and managers. All I had to do was mention my problem and they immediately offered to help. That was my last date with Kenny Rogers. As the saying goes, "What have you done for me lately?"

## Yabba Dabba Do

I spent many years promoting Ice Capades. In fact, I was responsible for almost a quarter of the dates for the East Coast tour. This story happened in 1991. Ice Capades feature that year was Fred Flintstone and other cartoon characters. I think the show was scheduled to play Erie, Utica and Johnstown. I was in charge of all three cities. This was in addition to half a dozen dates with other shows. I was a little stretched, to say the least.

I submitted marketing plans for each city and received the OK to proceed. This amounted to about \$5,500 in direct media purchases for each market. I was expected to get three to four times that amount in free coverage. If I purchased a six o'clock news spot, I needed to get the TV station to match another spot at no



Pennant sold on the Ice Capades show featuring the Flintstones.

charge. The same deal applied to radio, print, cable etc. When this was done correctly, the average person living in Erie couldn't turn on the TV or radio and not see an ad. In fact, they needed to see the ad a minimum of four times to be effective.

My first promotion with Ice Capades was 1985. I told my partner, Ben Morrow, that I thought the town was covered. He nodded and said "We'll see." After we finished at the box office, he suggested that we walk back to the Holiday Inn. It was only four blocks from the arena. During our walk, Ben stopped ten people and asked them what was going on at the arena that night. Not one person knew that Ice Capades was in town. He said that when I reached 50%, then I could feel that my job was done. It's a lesson that I learned very

well over the years.

In addition to the paid and promoted ad schedule, I had to arrange a number of "day of show" promotions. I would line up interviews with reporters, arrange for the TV weatherman to present the weather on the ice rink, etc. This year would feature a meet and greet with Fred Flintstone after each show.

Erie and Utica went very well. Johnstown ended up a story to remember. During the first show, I headed backstage to get my skater who was playing Fred Flintstone. The show manager informed me that he did not have anyone lined up to do this promotion in this city. He told me that the main office did not send him a promotion request form for Johnstown. We had to fill out all this useless paperwork for each date. It appears that I had done so for Erie and Utica, but not for Johnstown. Because I did not have the paperwork, they would not give me Fred Flintstone.

I think I started screaming that I needed a Fred Flintstone or I would have 5000 angry parents and kids. He looked at me and said, "Help yourself." Over in the corner was the costume they used for Fred. I was welcomed to put it on and meet the kids. I had very little choice, so I became Fred Flintstone for the day.

My problem with this whole thing was twofold. First, this costume weighed more than 70 pounds and was soaked with months of sweat. I nearly doubled over from the odor. Second, there was nobody to fill in for me. During the meet and greet, I would set up and monitor the line. As a result, I had to go out and do this alone.

All I really remember is being pushed to the floor at one point. Trapped inside this giant costume as hundreds of people swarmed around me. Finally, the arena security staff came to my rescue. They organized the line and provided some order to this disaster. I somehow managed to pull off the meet and greet.

That night I had dinner with the building manager, Jimmy Vauter. When the waiter approached our table, he announced that the special tonight was a brontosaurus steak covered in a yabba dabba do sauce. Jimmy had set this joke up. We had a good laugh about my day as a cartoon star.

### White Lightning

This story is about a phone man nicknamed White Lightning. Lightning had a peg leg and looked old beyond his years. He once told me he lost his leg in Vietnam and was a war hero. He worked for a promoter named Nancy Smith. Lightning never ran a phone room, but he was a first class circus ticket selling genius. Phone guys floated around the country and would join a phone room on a straight percentage basis.

Nancy stopped backstage and told me she had a good date. Near the end of the promotion, she had fired Lightning. She related the mystery of this enigmatic salesman.

Lightning would start each day sober and very focused. It should be mentioned, that without exception, every phone man had a habit. Heavy drugs, light drugs, heavy drinking, you name it. In most cases, the guys had more than one habit. The phone promoter's job was to babysit the phone people. In addition to the pros, promoters would hire local sales people. The locals would run the gambit from great to poor. A great salesperson did more than just read the script.

Lightning could sell ice cream to an Eskimo. He just had that kind of friendly voice and knew how to close a sale. He was very productive when he was sober. Before lunch, Lightning would always rack up several sales. After lunch, he would stumble back to the phone room. Lunch was a fluid proposition with Lightning. Nancy had to lay the law down. No drinking at lunch. Lightning didn't see the logic behind this request.

The following day, Nancy told Lightning he would have to order in lunch. He grumbled a little and ordered a pizza. When five o'clock rolled around, Lightning was sober and not in a great mood. The next day, Nancy watched Lightning deteriorate throughout the day. She thought he was getting drunk as the day progressed. The only place he went was to the bathroom. Nancy suspected that Lightning had smuggled some booze into the phone room. She inspected the bathroom, but could find nothing. She checked out his coat, nothing there. He had to have a bottle somewhere.

This continued all week. Nancy was getting angry! It's not so much that he was drunk but that his sales went down to nothing when he was in this state.

Nancy decided that firm management action was required. When Lightning headed for the restroom, Nancy waited about thirty seconds. She opened the door and marched right in. Nancy found Lightning sitting on the toilet holding his peg leg. The leg was hollow and was the perfect place to hide a bottle. He was fired and paid off.

The last time Nancy saw him, Lightning was sitting on the curb in Grand Junction, Colorado. He was throwing his peg leg out into the traffic, singing off key and enjoying life.

Phone men were a special breed.

### An Interview with Ray Winder, a Phone Promoter

Ray Winder began his career in show biz in 1950 with Wyman Baker, a ghost show operator. For anyone too young to remember, a ghost show was a spooky magic show which preceded a horror film. The ghost shows were presented at movie theatres, usually after midnight.

I asked Mr. Winder if they used phone promotions for the ghost shows. "We didn't need phones. These shows made so much money with just a standard promotion," said Winder. As that work disappeared, he moved into the phone business. In 1972 he joined Bill English and worked phone promotions for the Hanneford Circus. He spent three years with English before creating his own route.

Ray Winder carried his own phone men from town to town. Many phone promoters would move to the next town and hire local people to do the actual phone work. Other promoters traveled with their "crew" from city to city.

I asked him to describe a typical crew during the early 1970's. He detailed his working crew for the Shrine circus date at Columbia, South Carolina during the 1973 season.

His main man was named Charles. During the fifteen years that he worked for Ray, no one knew his last name. Charles had six driver's licenses, each with a different name. Charles told Ray that he was an ex-doctor who had lost his privileges and license. Charles always had a stethoscope in his pocket, even when selling tickets in the phone room. Ray was not sure if Charles was a doctor, because he also claimed that he was a minister and had worked for the CIA.

Little John and Big Ben had been hired straight out of prison. Ray would frequent the half way houses and sometimes show up at the penitentiary on release day. Ray only had two rules: You can't work when you're drunk and he would never bail you out of jail. Of course, the unofficial rule was you had to produce sales.

Little John and Big Ben were convicted murderers, but they could each sell several thousand of dollars of tickets each week. I asked Ray if he was concerned having a crew of murderers working for him. He told me that he didn't mind murderers, but would never hire any killers. He went on to explain that murders can just happen over a woman, money and the like. Most of the time the person didn't mean to do it. A killer was a different breed. They might kill



The Wainwrights early in their careers when they had a trampoline act. Author's photo.

you if you looked at them cross. "I don't need that kind of trouble in my phone rooms. There is enough work keeping everyone on the same page," said Ray.

To emphasize that point, Ray recalled a day during that promotion. He had to leave the phone room to meet with the Shriners. Upon his return, he found Little John on the floor of the men's room praying to a TV evangelist named Armstrong. Big Ben took to drinking and grabbed Ray and wanted to know if he would get a new body when he died. He was concerned that he may have abused his body during this life. Charles staggered in and announced, in a slurred voice, that he had gone to the local hospital to attend to a very special patient. He couldn't say more, very secret and hush-hush.

Ray Winder continued working circus and magic show phone rooms for the next 38 years. He is one of the great phone promoters during the golden age of phone rooms.

### Human Cannonball #37

I first met Wayne Wainwright during our 1992 season. At the time, his family was presenting their statue act and a knockabout number. I recently spoke with Wayne and coaxed him into a discussion of his years as a human cannonball.

I spent a good deal of time with Hugo Zacchini on the Hanneford show. We could not rig our spec floats until Hugo had "measured" his shot. I came to a little understanding of how the cannon worked. I asked Wayne if Edmondo Zacchini cannon was the same. The cannons the family used were created or copied from the design that Edmondo used. There were some small differences that Wayne noted. First, Edmondo was using a double cannon, two people from the mouth of the cannon. The second difference involved preparation. Wayne had a fair amount of chili the night before and remember to have enough matches with him in the barrel. (Author's note: I actually wrote all this down before I realized the joke.)

At 70 years young, Wayne remains an active person. His wit has not diminished. Here are the highlights of his interview.

Straka: How did you become a cannonball?

Wainwright: I was playing the Columbus, Ohio Shrine date, doing the trampoline act. Edmondo or Poppa as he was known, was on the show. At the cast party, I mentioned that I could do that act. I may have had a few drinks by the time I

made this statement. Much to my surprise, Poppa took me up on the offer. One of the two guys doing the act was leaving.

Straka: How long did it take you to learn the act?

Wainwright: Normally, it takes a month or two to be trained. I had six days in Nashville to learn. You start with a short shot, in fact the end of the barrel is touching the net! Each time the cannon is moved further from the net. As the shots progressed, two things happened. My clothes got tore up and so did my legs. Poppa didn't provide me with the leather flight suit right off so I did a lot of shots in my street clothes. When you hit the net it rips your clothes up pretty fast. The bruises on the inside of my legs were caused by the bicycle seat.

Straka: Is this another joke?

Wainwright: No, no, you sit on a bicycle seat but, this one was adjusted for the last guy. It produced two massive welts on my inner thighs.

Straka: Didn't someone advise you on what to do to correct this?

Wainwright: Oh, I had too much advise. There were eight former cannonballs living in Nashville at the time. Among others, there was two of Poppa's daughters, Walter and Ruth Patterson and Roy the other cannonball in the act. They all had advised eight different ways to "fix" it. I ended up using what worked for me.

By the end of the week, I had moved up to the real short shot—60 ft. to the net with a height of 50 ft.

Straka: How long did Roy stay in the act?

Wainwright: Only six months. Then Carol, my wife, learned the Wayne and Carol posed atop Edmondo Zacchini's cannon. Note their stage names. Author's photo.



EDMONDO ZACCHINI'S REPEATING CANNON SENSATION  
Featuring  
CAROL and WAYNE ZACCHINI

HUMAN PROJECTILES

act.

Straka: Before we get to Carol, any good stories of the Roy and Wayne days?

Wainright: I don't know if it's good but, it's a story I'll never forget. One night we were loaded into the cannon and took our positions. Suddenly, sparks and arcs of electricity started going off all around us. Poppa had no idea what was happening in the barrel.

He always called out "Are you ready?" We gave no response. He quickly realizes that there must be a problem. He has little choice, he must lower the barrel to get us out. Please remember that the cannon is

The great Edmondo Zacchini stands between Wayne and Carol in a publicity photo. Author's photo.

still primed to fire. If it had, we would have been shot straight under the net. We both crawled out and had 10,000 people boo us. I had never been booed in my life and certainly not by that many people. As it turned out, Poppa had left a coat hanger in the barrel and it had shorted out the heating system.

Straka: So Carol, your wife, joins the act.



Wainright: That's right, she started about one year later. I did five years and she did four. We did around 1400 shots together. It's very demanding, timing is everything. You leave the barrel going at 80 MPH, pulling around 11 G's. You gray out, losing focus for several seconds. Carol would land low in the net and I would land in the upper part of the net. We had to be careful not to hit each other on the bounce. We had worked up to the "big shot." That's a 200 foot long shot, with a 80 foot apex. No room for mistakes.

Straka: Were there any close calls?

Wainright: A few, of course it only takes one. The first time I did Denver, my hometown, I had a close call. Of course, my mother had to be in the audience. It was too hot and this affects where you are going to land. Poppa added 10 ft. to the jump to compensate for the heat. As it turns out, not a good decision. Carol made the net but, I hit the top ridge rope of the net. I was knocked out so the rest is a little muddled. They lowered the net with me in it. My mother is in a panic and runs out to the net screaming. Of course, not all the stories end badly. We were headed through White Sands, New Mexico and had an entire fighter squadron scrambled after us. Someone had spotted the cannon on the highway and thought it was a SCUD missile. Sometimes you just had to have some fun with the cannon. As we pulled into a toll booth, the collector asked us what in the heck were we hauling. With a straight face I told him it was a compactor orbiter. We collected garbage and shoot it into orbit. Sounded good to him.

Straka: OK how did you end up as cannonball #37?

Wainright: We worked at Baraboo and I had some free time to do some research. After Poppa stopped doing the act, he started using family and non-family members. It ends up that I was the 37<sup>th</sup> in a long line of cannonballs. Of course, Carol was #38. It was a great experience, but not for the faint of heart. **BW**

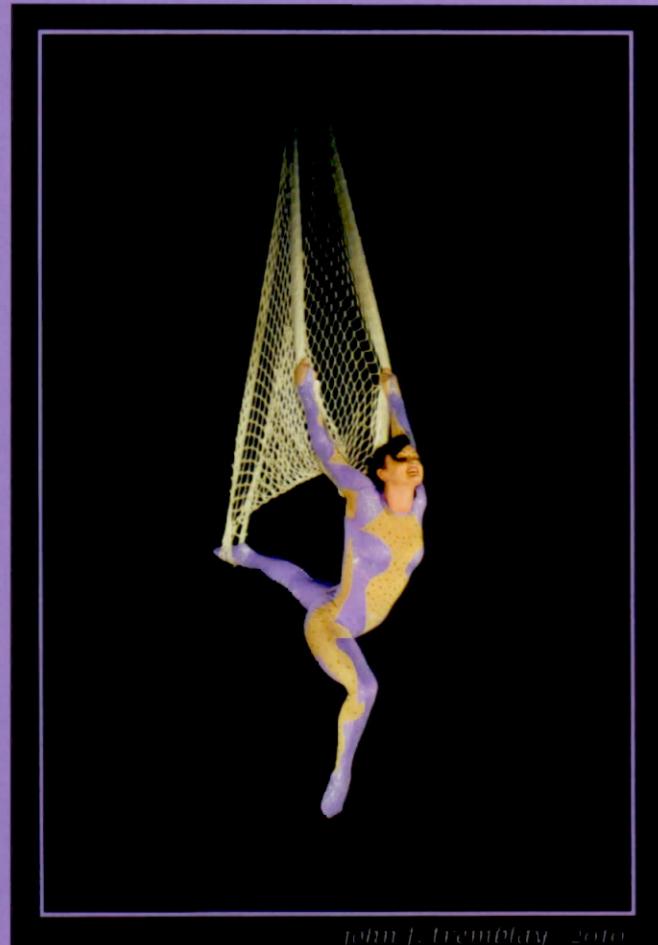
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# Risk and Danger in Trapeze Performance

By Peta Tait, Professor of Theatre and Drama, La Trobe University

## Flying

Circus became significant because circus bodies defied the physical norms in society. It brings together athleticism and artistry and additionally creates an impression of heightened danger. Circus performs an illusion of danger. Within circus some acts seem more physically demanding, with greater risks, than others. The flying trapeze act has been considered one of the most daring circus acts since the invention of flying action in 1859.<sup>1</sup> This article describes two performance histories of individual performers working in flying trapeze acts in the second half of the twentieth century to discuss the actual risks of this extreme body art.

Flying action evokes cultural resonances of flight and transcendence and inspires both anxiety and delight in spectators.<sup>2</sup> Until the twentieth-century advent of circus schools and YMCA programs, training in and knowledge of the physical techniques of circus skills were passed to apprentices working within professional troupes, usually family-based groups. Circus schools subsequently provided opportunities for the broader community to train in circus skills. Although the record-breaking flying trapeze feats are still largely done by members of family-based troupes, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, circus activities encompass a broad spectrum of participants and ways of working. From professional performers in what are termed new circuses like Cirque du Soleil without animal acts that developed after the 1970s, through to participants in leisure time activities and holiday programs, circus is promoted, presented and practiced for entertainment and for enjoyment. Some participants might be attracted because the performance seems risky.

The idea of circus is synonymous with adventure as a mythic realm of danger. The advent of circus skills as leisure activities suggests, however, that its physical risks are manageable. Danger in trapeze acts is theatrically embellished to take advantage of spectators' anxiety but this is illusionary because the actual risks are not seen. Aerialists very rarely fall but nonetheless accidents and injuries do happen, and qualitative interviews conducted between 2001-2005 with twelve female and ten male aerialists reveal that these are largely due to equipment failure. Professional performers have always been vigilant about minimizing the risk of injury, and constantly update safety regimes in conjunction with equipment innovation.

The function of the apparatus is often overlooked in what is a fascinating example of how the muscular body is disciplined in its engagement with equipment. The aerialist is a highly trained performer who masters a recognized set of movements or tricks as well as inventing new ones. Like athletes in competition, aerial artists have progressively pushed the limits on these tricks. As Foucault explains about the historical disciplining of the body in social power relations through exercise regimes: "Exercise is that technique by which one im-

poses on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graduated."<sup>3</sup> Out of a graduated repetition in aerial training has come a highly developed art form that is indicative of a larger cultural striving to dominate natural forces including gravity. The disciplined aerial body working on trapeze is a relatively recent invention.

It is through artists' profiles that it is possible to appreciate the extraordinary achievements of this art form. A performer's history contains features unique to that performer as well as elements common to most aerialists.

## Two Amazing Flyers

Mary Gill, and Frank Gasser, the two aerialists whose work is described below, participated in an Aerial Archive research project conducted by interview between 2001 and 2005.<sup>4</sup>

Mary Gill poses for a Ringling-Barnum publicity photo in 1969. Pfening Archives.





Before he found fame and fortune in Australia Wayne Larey was part of the Flying Wards on Sells-Floto in 1929. Back row, l. to r., Mitzi Slater, Frank Shepard, Wayne Larey, Harold "Toughie" Genders, Grace Genders. Front row, l. to r., Eileen Larey, Lilly Arbuckle, Mayme Ward, Agnes Doss. Pfening Archives.

The successful career of Mary Stewart Sanderson, known professionally as Mary Gill, lasted nearly twenty years and for twelve years she was a star trapeze flyer with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus as the female member of the four-person Flying Waynes.<sup>5</sup> The group was part of the Ringling Red Unit in 1973 when Mary's career ended abruptly with a serious accident due to equipment failure. Mary joined the legendary Ashton's Circus (Doug Ashton's circus) in 1956 at the age of fifteen and a half, probably against her parents' wishes--Ashton's is an Australian institution, a family circus dating from 1848.<sup>6</sup> Mary was not dance trained, but she worked first as a contortionist before moving on to a solo trapeze act. After four years Mary left Ashton's and joined the larger Wirth's Circus where Stanley Gill, Kitty Gill's son, worked in a trapeze act. Kitty was also part of this research. She was born in 1922 into an Australian circus family working with Wirth's. She worked on the full range of aerial apparatus available in the mid-twentieth century; flying trapeze, solo swinging trapeze, cloud swing (one rope looped up at both ends), web (single hanging rope with an ankle or wrist loop), and swinging perch (suspended vertical metal apparatus). Kitty Gill (née West) demonstrated the capacity to hold her weight with her teeth, and to slide down a vertical descent rope holding on by her teeth in the "slide for life."<sup>7</sup> This trick was achieved in her mid-teens through continuous practice and training.

Mary married Stanley and entered into the act, which was common and also practical for a life of constant touring. Working at Wirth's, Mary was coached on flying trapeze for two years by a leading ex-flyer, American Wayne Larey, who was the manager of Wirth's.<sup>8</sup> When Wirth's began to look like it would close, Wayne Larey returned to America in 1961 to work for Ringling-Barnum. Two months later Larey sent for his trapeze troupe at Wirth's, the Flying Waynes,

which included Mary, her then husband Stanley and Ronnie Ellis.

Proximity to a leading aerial flyer turned trainer had a major impact on Mary's career as it did for the other members of the Flying Waynes. It also provides a clear example of how a professional lineage might operate in aerial training and performance. Larey was not born into a circus family, but he was born in the important circus town of Bloomington, Illinois, which had both a circus training course at the YMCA, and the training barn of Eddie and Mayme Ward. The Wards trained most of North America's leading aerial artists for the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Larey trained and worked for the Flying Wards in 1928, and then the Flying Thrillers, before forming his own Flying Comets with two men and two females. They were later called the Covets working with Ringling-Barnum from 1936 to 1940.<sup>10</sup> At five foot ten inches, Wayne was taller than most flyers. Two shoulder injuries, in 1937 and 1938, meant that he gave up flying and managed the troupe before eventually managing the whole of Wirth's Circus.

Mary made the transition from solo trapeze artist to flyer through consistent training and effort. Her training happened after she performed daily, and she confirms that it was extremely hard work with the constant problem of sore hands from gripping the apparatus. Flying trapeze had even more impact on the body, especially on the shoulders with the effort of being caught by the catcher when travelling at speed. Mary explains that the performer does not think

Sergio Ramos and Mary Gill, half of the Flying Waynes trapeze act, in a 1969 Ringling-Barnum publicity photo. Pfening Archives.



about the physical effects during the performance and instead is constantly thinking about whether the trick is good or bad.

One of the highlights of Mary's career was a six-week season at New York's Radio City Music Hall in 1971.<sup>11</sup> Mary's performance work was also filmed and televised in North America in the 1960s as live circus furthered its access to a mass audience. The consequences of this mediaization are that audiences came to know circus through televised versions with close-ups and through the fictional circuses created in cinema.

Circus promotion with its photographs of female aerialists as glamorous showgirls reached a high point in the post World War II decades. A Ringling-Barnum promotional photograph of Mary in a standing pose was typical of the time; she is wearing a sequined bikini-style costume with a net midriff and stiletto heels. She stands slightly angled to the camera to lessen the effect of her muscular upper body, her blonde hair out long, and wearing false eye lashes, a tiara and a feather boa type headdress down to the back of her knees. Despite the feminine costume display, the muscularity of female aerialists could not be camouflaged during the act.

Mary was working in the 1950s and 1960s, at a time when trapeze acts had become particularly gender defined and female flyers were not expected to do the most difficult tricks, even on Ringling.<sup>12</sup> In an interview at the time, a younger Mary explained that she was "dreaming of love and a world where trapeze artists got paid regularly."<sup>13</sup> During the interview, trapeze soloist Vicki Unus described how Mary did much more than other females in flying acts because she executed difficult tricks. Vicki said, "But Mary is one of the few who works it." Mary was accomplished in the passing leap in which two flyers pass over each other mid-air, and was mastering a double somersault at that time. A passing leap was part

Mary Gill was more than window dressing in the Flying Waynes. Here she is shown doing a passing leap in a 1964 Ringling-Barnum publicity photo. Pfening Archives.



of the acclaimed Codonas act in the 1930s with Alfredo and Lalo Codona and Australian Vera Bruce at a time when females were still expected to master the same tricks as males.<sup>14</sup>

The interviewer asked Mary if she expected to spend her life in the circus and she replied, "Of course. . . . There's nothing routine in the circus. One day you do it right, and get excited, and the next day you do it wrong and can't wait to put it right the next time out."<sup>15</sup> Sadly, this was not to be the case and a freak accident cut short her working life in circus approaching her third decade (see below). Mary had two earlier more minor accidents before the serious accident that ended her career. While working in a fixed venue in 1973, a major accident was responsible for injuries that left Mary permanently mentally and physically disabled, and she lives on the \$1.7 million insurance compensation in Australia. Mary's accident needs to be put into perspective in that it was outside the performer's control and typifies the risk accompanying aerial performance as an unforeseen occurrence. Mary was standing on a platform that collapsed when another performer in the usual descent somersaulted into a net and a guy rope snapped.<sup>16</sup> Company workers inspected equipment before each show but this faulty rope was not spotted. Further, she had let go of the suspension ropes at the very moment of the accident because she was smiling at the audience and holding her hands in the air at the end of the act. Her fellow Flying Waynes on the platform, Stanley Gill, Sergio Ramos, and Vince Dillman, were holding onto the aerial rig as it collapsed. (The rig is a mid-air structure from which to suspend trapezes and platforms for flyers to stand on in between flying tricks.) Mary spent three weeks in a coma after falling 23 feet to a concrete floor of a Civic Centre and had to have brain surgery for a fractured skull. Today she talks with difficulty about her extraordinary career.

The risks associated with equipment failure become a common trope in the biographies of aerialists. After nearly four decades of performing, Kitty Gill's career also ended abruptly when she was forty-five due to equipment failure and possibly human error in the rigging. She had been planning to join her son Stanley and daughter-in-law Mary on Ringling-Barnum before the accident. She worked very high in the tent—this was an era before safety lines for solo performers became routine. Even so, a trapeze bolt broke and the whole trapeze gave away and she was seriously injured and not expected to live. She regained consciousness twenty-one days later to find she had broken both arms as well as her ribs and nose, and burst a kidney. After two years in hospital, and nineteen operations with two on her kidneys, Kitty came out of hospital to finally see the Flying Waynes on tour.

Frank Gasser is the highly-respected owner of Circus Royale, which has toured Australia, New Zealand and Asia for over thirty years, and he is part of an international circus dynasty.<sup>17</sup> Frank is married to ex-aerialist Manuela Gasser. They hired Manuela's brother Douglas Ferroni who executed a triple as a flyer for intermittent seasons during the 1980-1990s. Frank Gasser acknowledges how he was assisted by Doug Ashton to start his own circus after managing Ashton's, and was lent the tent and equipment to start up. Stories of business rivalry in circus are also balanced by this type of sharing of skills and resources.

Born into a Swiss circus family, Frank and his brother Anton both have gone on to run their own circuses from Australia. Anton and his sons own Silver's Circus, which featured in a 2005 Australian reality television series. Viewers watched television actors and personalities learn the basics in a series of circus acts in a short few days and then

perform them live with the professionals. The program emphasized the confessions of the novices about how terrified and nervous they were, especially on the high wire or the trapeze.

Frank was a flyer until he was fifty years of age and only retired from flying in 1987. This is a career of exceptional length for any athletic activity, and especially for a flyer. He worked on the high wire from five years of age standing on another performer's shoulders, on the perch and in acrobatic acts, and in a trapeze duo with Anton. He developed a Washington trapeze routine on his grandfather's trapeze, and this specialized act usually includes an upside down head balance. Frank's son Carlos has the same apparatus. Altogether Frank learned twenty one acts.

When Frank came to Australia under contract to Bullen's Circus in 1961, he was in an acrobatic balance duo with Rene Kathriner and performing Washington trapeze rather than flying, because he did not want the complication of travelling with the rigging for the flying trapeze. The premium placed on flying acts within circus and by audiences, however, meant that he was soon flying again. As a young flyer in his prime in the 1960s, he performed a number of complicated and difficult tricks including a double somersault with a half twist to the trapeze bar.<sup>18</sup> He joined Ashton's Circus and the Flying Ashtons in 1968. In the early 1970s at the height of post war Australian circus popularity, the Ashtons could mount two flying troupes at the same time, providing their largest tent could be erected. The lead flyers in two troupes, Mervyn Ashton and Frank, used to synchronize their action as well as compete with each other in mid-air mastery. A light-moving flyer, Mervyn was actually heavier bodied than Frank, so Frank had to leave the aerial platform slightly before him. Memorably at the end of one performance, Frank bounced into one of two nets below that were connected to each other and, when Mervyn landed in the second net, he catapulted Frank back into the air. Frank caught the flyer's trapeze bar and was able to sit on it. They retained this incidental new trick in the show.

Flyers explain that the biggest risk for them is missing a catch and potentially the net. While the net makes their work appear safe, in actuality if they land in the net wrongly, they can be seriously injured. Aerialists have to learn how to land properly on their backs in the net. Often aerialists in tricks like somersaults are travelling very fast and, when they realize that they are not going to make the catch, they are at risk of falling outside the net.

Frank is clear that aerialists have to be strong for their body weight and have good co-ordination for balance. He explains that he never experienced fear and instead felt that he was in his element performing at heights. Although he always took care not to push himself beyond what was expected and take unnecessary risks, he was renowned for his constant practicing and admits he was almost fanatical about training.

This article presents two specific performer histories to discuss the larger issue of risk in aerial performance. As indicated, circus performers work to minimize risk but the possibility that the equipment or the rigging will fail remains. While the performer can offset this risk with vigilance and to some degree luck as Frank's performance history attests, Mary's circumstance illustrate how the risk invariably increases with unfamiliar environments. These risks are unseen while an idea of danger is theatrically performed by an aerialist as part of the act for spectators.

#### Endnotes

1. Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (London: Routledge, 2005), page 9.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Translated by Alan

Sheridan (NY: Vintage Books, 1979), page 161.

4. This Aerial Archive is co-ordinated by the author and held at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

5. Interview with Mary Gill conducted with Kathryn Neische and the author, 31 October 2000, and information in this article about her was obtained from this interview unless stated otherwise.

6. Judy Cannon with Mark St Leon, *Take A Drum and Beat it: The Astonishing Ashtons 1848-1990s* (Sydney: Tytherleigh Press 1997).

7. Information about Kitty Gill is taken from an interview with the author, 21 November 2000.

8. Jim Fogarty, *The Wonder of Wirths* (Sydney: JB Books, 2000), page 79.

9. Steve Gossard, "Flying Wards," *Bandwagon*, 30 (6) November-December 1986, pages 5-20.

10. Steve Gossard, *A Reckless Era of Aerial Performance, the Evolution of the Trapeze*. Manuscript Publication (Milner Library, Illinois State University, 1994), page 157.

11. The program for Thursday 16 December 1971 reveals a variety show that included performer Angela Lansbury in a scenario "Bedknobs and Broomsticks," and at number four: "Daredevils of the Air," Total Thrills on the Towering Trapeze starring the Peerless Flying Waynes (courtesy of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus)." Radio City Music Hall, Program Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre (Melbourne).

12. Tait, *op. cit.*, pages 103-5.

13. Sidney Fields, "Only Human," *New York Mirror*, 21 April 1963, page 42.

14. Tait, *op. cit.*, pages 93-5, 98.

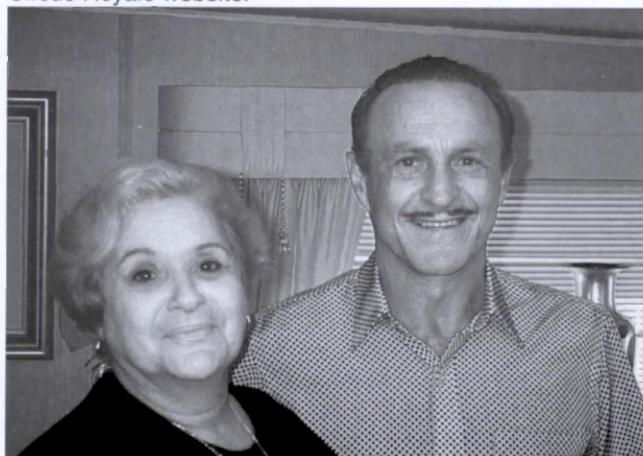
15. Fields, *op. cit.*

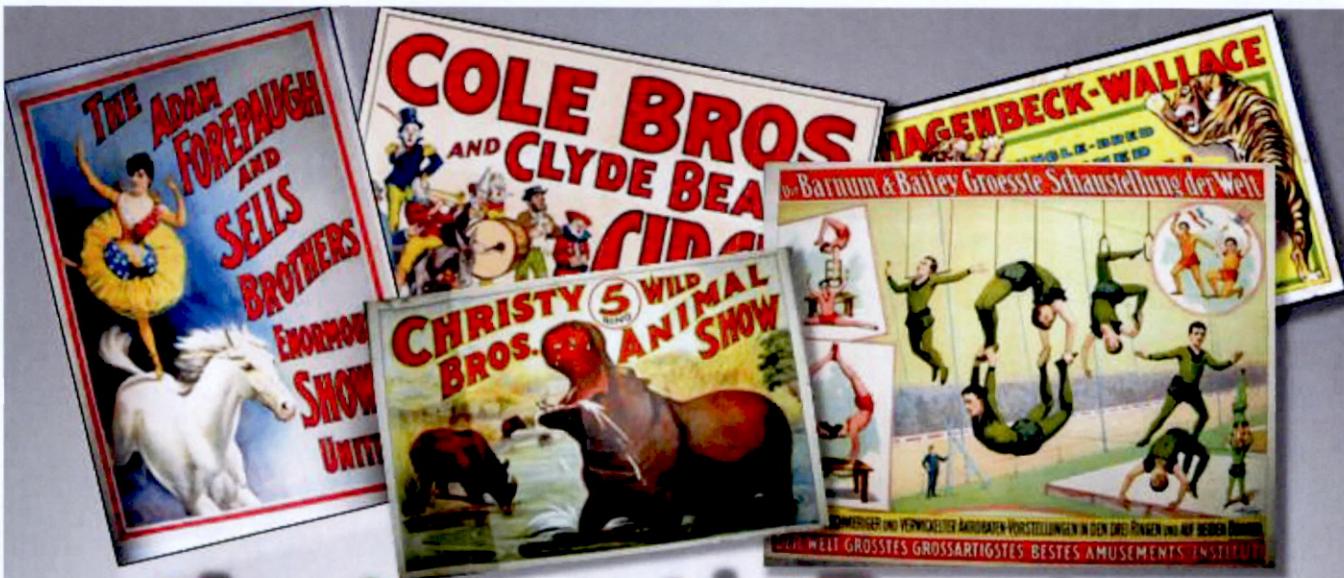
16. *The Ottawa Citizen*, Monday October 29, 1973 No. 100; *Southern Sawdust*, No. 77. Fall, November 1973.

17. Information given in an interview with the author, 1 November 2005.

18. Frank worked for Bullen's Circus in 1961-1962, Sarrasani's Circus 1963-1964, Bullen's 1965-1966, Australian clubs 1967, Ashton's Circus 1968-1975, manager of Ashton's Blue 1972-1974, Circus Royale 1975 onwards touring Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia 1989, Thailand 1990, and Malaysia 1991. As a flyer at that time his tricks included: pirouette, lay-out somersault with pirouette returning with one and a half; pirouette to bar; pirouette to pirouette; somersault with half twist to stick (bar held by catcher) with a half somersault back to return; double somersault lay-out; double with half twist with somersault to bar. **BW**

Frank Gasser and wife Manuela in a recent photo from the Circus Royale website.





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To take advantage of this rate, reservations must be received by May 9, 2011.

Features of the meeting will include a number of outstanding presentations on circus history; a discussion panel on the connection between circuses and zoos; field trips to the Cincinnati Art Museum, and the Vent Haven Museum, which commemorates the history of ventriloquism; and of course the banquet.

Material from the legendary collection of the late Fred D. Pfening, Jr. will highlight the auction of circus memorabilia. Letterheads, programs, posters, photos and other circiana going back to the nineteenth century will go on the block, including a number of rarely available items.

The festivities begin on Wednesday afternoon June 8 with registration in the hotel lobby. Thursday starts with a field trip to the Cincinnati Art Museum to view *The Amazing American Circus Poster*, an exhibit of the Strobridge Lithograph Company's circus posters from 1879 to 1938. Many of the images are one of a kind and others have never been reproduced or seen in public. We will have a special tour of the exhibit. This is a one-time opportunity to see some of the finest circus posters ever created.

Two speakers will provide additional information about the print-

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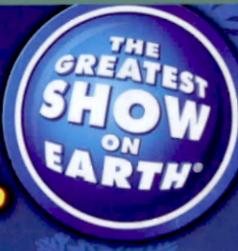


One of over 200 1882 Strobridge lithographs in the collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum. Many of these remarkable posters will be part of the museum's exhibition, which will be one of the convention's highlight.

ers and posters produced in the area. Chris Berry will provide an overview of the Donaldson Lithograph Company of Cincinnati, and Newport, Kentucky. This firm created circus, minstrel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, movie, and theatrical posters. John Polacsek will discuss the Strobridge lithographs advertising the black tent of the Barnum & Bailey Circus. During the 1890s these venues were home to a number of illusions that were created by Professors Hoffman and Roltair. Professor Powell performed his amazing Cremation Act, growing to fame as a magician in the Barnum and Bailey after show concert.

The convention registration is \$125.00 which includes all meals and events. Make your check payable to the Circus Historical Society and mail to: Robert Cline, CHS Secretary, 2707 Zoar Road, Cheraw, South Carolina 29520. If you have questions regarding the convention or would like to make a presentation contact John Polacsek at 5980 Lannoo Street, Detroit, Michigan 48236, 1-313-885-7957 or [artistsofdetroit@aol.com](mailto:artistsofdetroit@aol.com). A convenient registration form is included in this month's *Bandwagon*.

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